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Official Records

57th plenary meeting
Monday, 26 November 2007, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim .... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Hannesson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 121 (*continued*)

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Mr. Romero-Martínez (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): Like other delegations, my delegation takes note of the importance that has been granted to this issue. For that reason, we welcome the fact that at the previous session the President of the General Assembly included the item on the agenda and that this year the President, with his usual intelligence is also granting it due priority and interest.

Honduras believes that the purpose of the revitalization of the General Assembly be to reassert the central role of the General Assembly pursuant to its Charter mandate as the principal deliberative organ for the adoption of actions and universal policies for the benefit of humanity.

We agree with other delegations about the lack of a report setting out in a logical manner the progress attained or indicating a clear direction for Member States. But we also wish to underscore that we have made some progress. Honduras greatly appreciates the work of the Facilitators — the Permanent Representatives of Senegal and San Marino. We are certain that they will continue their work in other specific areas, and we look forward to the endeavours of their successors, the representatives of Poland and Paraguay.

Honduras believes that mandate review is an important goal. The rationalization and unification of items and the adoption of coherent policies will make it possible, above all, to provide a united and universal response that will benefit both our Organization and our peoples, who sometimes see us as representing their hopes, and as possessing solutions to their most urgent problems.

Mandate review could also rationalize the resources that are currently scattered throughout the Organization. We also believe it is necessary to prioritize and refine our programme of work as well as to restructure and re-programme the Main Committees and improve their working methods.

In the past, we have said that the revitalization process must respond to the need to restore a proper balance of powers and functions among the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. In our view, it would be fitting to establish, perhaps informally, a coordination mechanism in order to ensure proper communication with a broad spirit of interdependence and a strong desire to cooperate. The proliferation of resolutions and the lack, sometimes, of an adequate mechanism to ensure compliance are disturbing.

As a founding country and one of the original signatories of the Charter, Honduras will continue to participate in all debates and negotiations designed to strengthen our Organization.

As we have often stated in this forum, Honduras aspires to a strong, united Organization that is solidly

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committed to the issues of the day, that will listen to the sometimes painful cries of humankind, and that will glimpse with satisfaction the everlasting smiles and eternal dreams of millions of human beings who yearn for a world of greater solidarity and sensitivity and that is filled with peace, justice and equality — a world of equality for all, a world that does not exclude anyone.

Ms. Blum (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first to highlight the leadership of the President of the General Assembly and the able manner in which he is leading our work on the matter under consideration. Likewise, I would like to express my delegation's recognition to the Permanent Representatives of San Marino and Senegal for their work as Facilitators for the revitalization of the General Assembly during the previous session. Their contributions are an important starting point to continue the consideration of the matter at this session. Furthermore, my delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The General Assembly was established as the sole universal organ of the Organization, with a broad mandate that includes, inter alia, economic, social, political, and cooperation issues as well as those relative to disarmament and the maintenance of peace and security. The General Assembly has the authority to discuss any matter in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and to formulate the recommendations it considers appropriate.

As a founding Member of the United Nations, Colombia attaches great importance to the revitalization of the General Assembly as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ and considers that this process is essential to the reform and strengthening of the Organization.

The process of revitalization has been long and slow. Nevertheless, significant progress has been achieved, such as improvement in the dialogue between the President of the General Assembly and Member States, the rationalization of the work of the Main Committees and the convening of thematic debates, which have made a positive contribution to the work of this body.

In that regard, we believe that greater progress can still be achieved in these areas through new thematic debates and more structured interactive work between the President of the General Assembly and Member States, which could begin a month in advance of the start of each session. It is necessary to continue the rationalization of the agenda of the Assembly and the reduction in the number of items, so that small delegations — the majority of delegations represented here — can fully carry out their responsibilities and cover issues of national interest.

Options for turning General Assembly debates into real exchanges of ideas, with interaction among Member States and with the opportunity to offer positive and constructive comments on the statements made, should be explored. There are also several matters on which the Assembly's resolutions could be shorter and more action-oriented. To that end, the Main Committees could improve the organization of their work in order to have more focused discussions.

It is also important for the Committees to make a greater effort to add value to their deliberations and resolutions in order to minimize the use of repetitive language negotiated at previous sessions. In that respect, the reports and recommendations of the Secretary-General can play an important role. They should focus on recent developments and in formulating new action-oriented suggestions. The recommendations in those reports should be examined in the light of their contribution to General Assembly revitalization.

Furthermore, adequate coordination is also required between the revitalization and mandate review processes, as both are concerned with the General Assembly agenda. In this regard, it is necessary to have clarity on the scope of those two processes in order to avoid duplication and achieve better results.

Colombia is concerned with the imbalance that exists in the relationships between the main bodies of the Organization and stresses the need to restore the balance stipulated in the United Nations Charter. The General Assembly should have a more active role in the consideration of issues related to peace and security, in accordance with functions assigned to it. Likewise, the encroachment on items within its competence by other bodies should be avoided. The consideration of issues such as human rights and humanitarian law belong exclusively and solely to the General Assembly.

The debate on Security Council reform that took place in this Hall two weeks ago made it clear that the relationship and communication between that body and the General Assembly must improve. The holding of periodic meetings between the Presidents of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council, as well as the presentation of analytical reports by the Council to the Assembly are some of the ways to reach that goal. It is also necessary to have more frequent presentations and briefings by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly.

The implementation of General Assembly resolutions is another area where greater efforts are required. A greater commitment by States to implement the resolutions adopted by this body is necessary. The presentation of a report by the Secretary-General on the status of implementation would be useful.

In the specific area of the implementation of resolutions on revitalization, we regret not being able to refer to the report of the Secretary-General, as it was not published in time to be considered in our debate today.

The revitalization process should also include greater participation of the General Assembly in the election of its President and of the Secretary-General. In the election of the latter, different alternatives could be examined. Candidates could be presented a year before the election and Member States could express their preference by casting a ballot, which could be open or secret.

My delegation supports the establishment of an ad-hoc working group to continue the consideration of the revitalization of the General Assembly. It is important that during this session tangible results are achieved and that these are later reflected in a resolution that includes substantive elements to advance the process.

Colombia maintains its commitment to continue contributing to the revitalization of the General Assembly in order to strengthen its role and authority. My delegation will continue to support efforts to allow this body to fully carry out its functions as provided in the Charter of the United Nations. This is the only way that we can meet the goals of greater democracy, representation and effectiveness in the work of our Organization.

To conclude, allow me to congratulate and to express the support of my delegation to the Ambassadors of Paraguay and Poland for their appointment as facilitators of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the revitalization of the General Assembly.

Mr. Bodini (San Marino): First of all, I want to thank the President and all of the colleagues who so kindly mentioned Ambassador Badji and me in today's speeches. I wish at the same time to congratulate the Permanent Representatives of Poland and Paraguay on their appointment as new Co-Chairs for the Ad Hoc Working Group on the revitalization of the General Assembly.

Once again, I wish to mention the importance of the reform of the General Assembly in all its aspects. After spending much time — hours — with Ambassador Badji and many Members, I strongly believe that we are ready for a true reform of the General Assembly. Not only do we have to improve our working methods and the election and selection of the President of the General Assembly and of the Secretary-General, but, more importantly, our relationship with other organs of the United Nations must be improved and made more direct.

We must ensure that this Hall is the centre of our focus, in all of our speeches on existing issues. We must make sure that the General Assembly is at centre stage in our planning as we programme our responses and activities in this evolving world.

I take this opportunity again to thank all Member States for their support during the time Paul Badji and I spent as facilitators. I hope from the bottom of my heart that this year will be the right year for a strong reform of the Assembly.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on the issue. The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Agenda items 48 (*continued*), 116, 117 and 123

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Draft resolution (A/62/L.15)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

United Nations reform: measures and proposals

Strengthening of the United Nations system

The Acting President: In connection with agenda item 48, members will recall that the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/62/89 has already been discussed, at the 39th plenary meeting, held on 30 October 2007.

I now give the floor to the representative of Kyrgyzstan to introduce draft resolution A/62/L.15.

Mr. Jeenbaev (Kyrgyzstan): On behalf of more than 80 sponsors, I would like to introduce, under item 48 of the agenda of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, entitled "Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields", draft resolution A/62/L.15, entitled "World Day of Social Justice".

Both the World Summit and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly were devoted to the issues of maintaining global social development and recognizing the importance of the social well-being of all peoples. Achieving those goals has been declared a priority for the twenty-first century. The Declaration on Social Progress and Development proclaimed that

> "Social progress and development shall be founded on respect for the dignity and value of the human person and shall ensure the promotion of human rights and social justice". (*resolution 2542 (XXIV), article 2*).

Today, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and its Programme of Action, as well as the Millennium Declaration, which encourages global dialogue on social development, form a basis for social justice at both the national and the international levels. Accordingly, there is today consensus on the need to pursue development, and the obligations to eradicate poverty and establish socially stable and safe societies have been set out.

We should note that, during the second half of the last century and the beginning of the third millennium, humankind has paid steadfast attention to ensuring social rights and the setting of social policy. However, we must acknowledge that continued social inequality in various parts of the world continues to be the basic obstacle to further development of the human potential; that inequality also fails to reflect the gradual development of that potential.

For that reason, the world community is increasingly aware of the fact that social policy is a problem of vital importance that can be solved only through concerted efforts. The responsibility for social development therefore lies with countries themselves. It cannot be successfully achieved without the collective efforts of the international community. Strengthening international cooperation is of great importance for the realization of a socially focused strategy, as well as for subsequent actions and initiatives.

We are convinced that the General Assembly's adoption of this draft resolution will lead to even greater attention by the international community to achieving the goals and resolving the problems set out in the Millennium Declaration and the Copenhagen Declaration and its Programme of Action. Its adoption would also be a demonstration of support for the principles of solidarity and tolerance and for the interests of all population groups on all continents in establishing a world policy of social justice.

On behalf of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, I would like to express our deep appreciation to all Member States that have co-sponsored and actively supported this draft resolution. I hope, and firmly believe, that the General Assembly will adopt this document by consensus.

Mr. Lemos Godinho (Portugal): I speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey and Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, align themselves with this statement.

In September 2005, heads of States and Government gathered at the World Summit to assess the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits and the progress made in implementing the Millennium Declaration. They also sought to find additional momentum for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The EU is pleased that, in the years since that meeting, there have been achievements in the reform process of the United Nations launched by the World Summit Outcome. In that regard, we would like to refer to the progress made in the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Human Rights Council and the Ad Hoc Committee on Mandate Review, as well as the progress made thus far in the areas of management reform, the adoption of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the reform of the Economic and Social Council.

The European Union also wishes to commend the organization of key events and thematic debates during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly on such matters as climate change and financing for development, as well as the forthcoming specific meeting on development and the high-level plenary meeting devoted to the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children. Coupled with other informal meetings on equally relevant matters, those events will contribute to the revitalization of both the General Assembly and the Organization as a whole, and to the follow-up of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields.

Allow me to draw the Assembly's attention to a number of specific issues.

With regard to the Economic and Social Council, the Union is committed to a strengthened Council as the central mechanism for system-wide coordination and the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of, and follow-up to, the major United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields. The adoption of resolution 61/16, on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, the subsequent organization of the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and the launching of the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) constitute concrete steps towards strengthening the Council. As part of that strengthening, the European Union also looks forward to the discussions to be held on the adaptation of the work of the Council — including its organization of work, agenda and current methods — as per Council decision 2006/206.

The EU is also pleased with the adoption of the multi-year programme of work for the Annual Ministerial Review. We look forward to the discussions on the theme of the 2008 AMR, namely, "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development", as well as to future discussions on global public health in 2009.

The AMR not only adds value to the fulfilment and implementation of the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals, but is also a crucial mechanism to emphasize the Council's role as the policy coordination body of the United Nations system for economic, social and environmental matters.

The European Union is convinced that the involvement of all relevant development actors in the DCF process provides a unique opportunity to gather a wide range of inputs for a deepened dialogue and understanding on the international development cooperation agenda. With regard to the agenda of the DCF, the European Union considers it important that the Forum also addresses issues such as aid architecture and the implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

As for development, the 2005 Summit emphasized that it must be based on a truly global partnership. The European Union would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm its strong commitment to the MDGs and its continued support for developing countries in the implementation of their national development strategies through actions on aid volume, aid effectiveness, debt relief, innovative finance mechanisms, trade and the relevant international institutions. Actions to reach those goals at all levels should be undertaken in an integrated way that promotes efficiencies and reduces duplication and unnecessary competition.

On that foundation of partnership, the EU has taken effective measures to meet its commitments as a donor. It has collectively surpassed the 2006 target for official development assistance (ODA) of 0.39 per cent of gross national income (GNI), which was set in 2005 before the World Summit Outcome. Furthermore, the EU has set new ambitious targets for 2010 and 2015, including new levels for Africa. It is currently providing 57 per cent of global ODA, and is committed to reaching the target of 0.7 per cent of GNI in ODA by 2015. We will continue to make efforts to meet and exceed our timetables and invite other countries to follow suit.

Climate change poses one of the greatest challenges in history for humankind. Scientific evidence judiciously compiled by the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirms and intensifies previous warnings about the magnitude of the challenge. Climate change is already altering the face of the Earth and will increasingly become a contributing factor to environmental, economic and security threats, endangering also the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals that the international community has placed at the core of its development efforts.

The scale of the challenge and the urgency of addressing it call for unprecedented international cooperation involving all countries in a global effort to halt climate change, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and the respective capabilities of countries and with the United Nations system at the centre of that endeavor. In addition to mitigating the effects of climate change, adaptation is crucial. Developing countries, especially the most vulnerable ones, face new important challenges in adapting to climate change, which also hampers their achievement of the MDGs. The United Nations system has a key role to play in that respect.

The European Union therefore welcomes last week's consensus adoption of resolution 62/8, on overview of United Nations activities relating to climate change, and underlines the importance of the United Nations system addressing the issue of climate change in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. Furthermore, the EU would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for briefing the wider membership about his recent trip to South America and Antarctica and for commenting on the latest report of the IPCC, once again sharing with all of us his views and concerns on climate change. In that same spirit, the EU would like to congratulate Assembly President Kerim for his dynamism in promoting discussion on climate change.

The European Union has had a leading role in this area and is firmly committed to continue to work towards growing international consensus on the need to take further and stronger actions to tackle the negative effects of climate change. Next month's United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali will be a crucial moment to transform into deeds the international political momentum galvanized by the high-level event convened by the Secretary-General on 24 September 2007, as well as to advance current negotiations with a view to agreeing a new multilateral, comprehensive, coherent and effective post-2012 regime by 2009. To that end, the thirteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in Bali, must establish a clear road map towards the fifteenth Conference, which is to be held in Copenhagen in 2009.

The European Union would like to draw attention to the fact that HIV/AIDS remains a global scourge that must be combated at all levels through the scaling up of prevention, treatment, in particular antiretroviral therapy, care and support. In that connection, the development and implementation of inclusive country-led strategies based on the "Three Ones" principle is key. Special attention must therefore be paid to combating stigma and discrimination and protecting human rights — including those of vulnerable groups — as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights, in particular those of women and young people, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. In that respect, the European Union looks forward to engaging in discussion on the modalities for the General Assembly's comprehensive review on HIV/AIDS that will take place in 2008.

As for peace and security — another major topic of the 2005 World Summit — the European Union encourages further progress on issues such as security sector reform; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; the role of natural resources in conflicts; the rule of law; electoral practices; peacebuilding; democratic governance; the protection of civilians and return of refugees and internally displaced persons; humanitarian assistance and development. In that respect, we would like to reiterate the unquestionable interconnection between development and security.

Finally, with regard to human rights, in complementarity to the action of the General Assembly and its Third Committee, the European Union hopes that all conditions are now in place for efficient and credible implementation of the Council's mandate, as foreseen in Assembly resolution 60/251. In that regard, the EU would like to see an improved and stronger system of special procedures emanating from the review of individual mandates that just started during the sixth session of the Human Rights Council.

The European Union remains committed to the principles and fundamental rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and looks forward to the commemoration of its sixtieth anniversary, in 2008. It is our belief that we should do so by implementing and mainstreaming human rights in the work of the Organization, including at the field level, and by counting on and supporting the valuable work of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office.

In conclusion, the European Union is fully committed to fulfilling the principles contained in the World Summit Outcome, whereby development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

Mrs. Chabau (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation associates itself with the statement to be made on this subject by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We would also like to make some comments on this issue, which is of particular importance for developing countries.

We are virtually halfway to the target set for the achievement of the modest objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the achievement of the Goals is each day further from becoming a reality. In accordance with the MDGs, by 2015 we should have reduced the number of people living in extreme poverty in developing countries by half. However, while 1.276 billion people were living in extreme poverty in 1990, that number has grown to 2.5 billion today.

By 2015, we should reduce the under-5 mortality rate by two thirds. However, 10.1 million children continue to die before their fifth birthday, mainly as a result of preventable causes. Obviously, we will not be able to achieve that goal.

We set out to halt HIV/AIDS and to begin to reduce its spread by 2015. Nevertheless, last year, the number of people who died as a result of that disease rose to 2.9 million.

We established the goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015. However, 115 million children lack access to primary education. At the current pace, when will we be able to announce the achievement of that goal?

We were supposed to guarantee environmental sustainability by 2015. However, the important goals that we agreed upon at Johannesburg in order to achieve true sustainable development are still far from becoming realities. The threat of accelerated global climate change is growing, together with that of environmental degradation. Today, the situation is much more serious, the dangers are greater and we have much less time left.

The so-called development agenda for the poorest nations is far from truly being implemented. Developing countries continue to suffer from the scourge of poverty, a lack of resources and marginalization. Their severe economic problems continue to grow, together with armed conflicts, natural disasters and the spread of diseases.

While 1 per cent of the world's richest people control 40 per cent of its wealth, the poorest 50 per cent of population has barely 1 per cent. Inequalities continue to grow among and within countries. The rich continue to become richer and the poor to become poorer. Unfortunately, that trend continues to characterize the current state of international relations, to the detriment of the full enjoyment of the right to development, which remains a pipe dream for the world's poor nations.

Lasting solutions to the issues addressed in the Monterrey Consensus — such as official development assistance (ODA), external debt, direct foreign investment and international trade — also remain illusory. Despite the promises made, ODA continues to decrease and remains significantly below 0.7 per cent. In 2006, it accounted for only 0.3 per cent of the gross national product of developed countries.

The external debt of developing countries continues to increase. Last year, it reached a staggering $2.851 trillion.

Developing countries continue to participate to a very small degree in international trade compared with industrialized countries. Developing countries, which have nearly four fifths of the world's population, take part in only one third of international trade. Their marginalization in the international market is increasing, which is reinforcing the net transfer of financial resources from the South to the North and consolidating the unequal distribution of costs and benefits resulting from that process.

Paradoxically, each year, more than $1 trillion continues to be invested in military spending and additional billions of dollars in advertising. With scarcely 10 per cent of the total resources currently used for military spending, we could achieve the MDGs. Regrettably, the industrialized world seems to have overlooked all of this and continues to lack the political will to take historic decisions that would correct the structural inequalities of the international economic system, which is completely unsustainable.

Today, it is more necessary than ever before that developed countries honour the commitments that they have made at the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields. Those commitments cannot remain dead letters or mere political slogans aimed at diluting responsibilities or delaying their fulfilment.

It is time that the entire international community give responsible and in-depth consideration to the situation that developing countries continue to endure as a result of the unjust and unequal world economic order, which has proved to be unsustainable. Resolving the problems that developing countries continue to face and preserving nature and the human race itself are issues that concern the entire international community, without distinctions between rich and poor.

The objectives have been identified. However, if we are to be able to attain them, it is vital that developed countries demonstrate the necessary political will and meet their commitments — an issue that undoubtedly remains the key challenge to be overcome. Only then we will be able to guarantee a true and just global partnership for development.

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt attaches special importance to the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, which have made major contributions to the agenda for action on international development based on partnership, respect and solidarity.

The beginning of the sixty-second session witnessed a series of high-level meetings on the implementation of those decisions. First was the high-level event on climate change, and it was followed by the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, in preparation for the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha in the second half of 2008. At the same time, negotiations are ongoing in various Committees — particularly the Second and Third Committees — on draft resolutions related to various issues in this sphere.

Despite the efforts of the United Nations in the area of development, many decisions adopted at the major conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields have yet to be sufficiently implemented. We are closely following efforts to review those decisions, including in the following areas.

First, developed countries are still not honouring their commitments to provide sufficient financial resources to United Nations operational activities in the area of development. Such activities have seen an ever-sharper decline in financing from the programme budget through voluntary contributions. This means that developed countries are linking financing to their political agendas. That in turn affects the neutrality of the United Nations and contradicts relevant General Assembly resolutions affirming the principles of national ownership and sovereignty and rejecting double standards and conditionalities.

Secondly, there is a growing tendency to separate environmental issues, in particular climate change, from issues of sustainable development. In that context, we should be cautious of going too far, as the implications of those attempts will be reflected in the long-term by widening the gap between the rich and the poor, and at the same time will not achieve the target of sustainable development. However, that does not affect our full support for efforts to deal with the challenges raised by climate change. The developing countries, especially the African States, are the lowest emitters, yet they are the most affected by the impact. Thus, efforts by the General Assembly — supported by the Secretary-General — must focus on reaching a substantive and balanced agreement to address the issue, while taking into account information provided by international experts on the current situation and its causes. The needs of developing countries must also be taken into account, including how to enhance their capabilities to adapt to the threats emanating from this phenomenon by providing financing, technology transfer and capacity-building. Commitments between developing and developed countries must be balanced according to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, burdens and obligations.

Mechanisms for the implementation, follow-up and coordination of these decisions exist within the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, but the political will to achieve them is still missing. On the contrary, we are of the view that some seek to impose those commitments on developing countries only, as they are the recipients of assistance and in order to prevent implementation of the decisions by the developed countries.

While developed countries choose to ignore their own human rights situations, they intentionally focus on the same situations in developing countries, while calling for enforcement of the rule of law, democracy and political, economic and social reform at the national level, while also ignoring efforts to exert parallel efforts in international relations, which has resulted in the absence of good governance at the international level. That situation contributes to mistrust and division among the general membership and creates new international situations that go beyond the scope of normal international relations and the agreed procedures for international law. It also leads to double standards in the consideration of issues of disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, thus threatening the non-proliferation system and international peace and security.

In the economic and social fields, and despite the end of an era of summits and conferences that extended over the past ten years and resulted in consensus decisions, it is necessary to strengthen the ability of the United Nations to analyse, monitor and follow up international and regional developments, by reforming the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and providing it with financial resources — as was the case with the Department of Political Affairs — in accordance with the proposed reform plan of the Secretary-General.

While expressing our willingness to consider proposals to support United Nations efforts in the field of preventive diplomacy, we affirm the need to address the issue of transparency and consultation with Member States. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs will also have to share the same support requested by the Department of Political Affairs, in accordance with the 2005 World Summit Outcome, which established a link between security, development and human rights.

This leads us to the implementation of the outcomes of summits related to the status of women and their empowerment. It has become clear that we have lost our way in arguing over the establishment of new structures and entities without focusing on the true developmental needs of women and on giving equitable consideration to their needs — as compared to those of men — in the fields of education, health care and others, respect for their basic human rights in their countries of immigration, their rights under occupation and their rights as indigenous inhabitants. It is also necessary to pay attention to the status of the child at the international level by prohibiting violence against children and ensuring their rights in education, health care and economic development.

In that context, coordinated and integrated follow-up to outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits calls for improvement in the performance of the Organization and an increase in the efficiency of its services in order to make the best use of available resources. That follow-up would encourage us to avoid issuing new mandates that could contradict the current mandates of existing bodies and to avoid reviewing mandates related to sensitive political issues that have special importance to specific countries. We also need to avoid any attempts to link the budget with reform, which will lead us to repeat past confrontations among the general membership and deepen the feelings of mistrust — and now is the time to put an end to those feelings.

In this context, it is essential to maintain the credibility of the General Assembly in dealing with international challenges through faithful and effective implementation of its resolutions, and by respecting what has been previously agreed on, including the Rio and Johannesburg Principles, because focusing on media coverage and convening meetings at different levels must be met by coordinated and effective action for implementation, otherwise, poor implementation will further erode the credibility of international collective work in the economic and social fields. The resulting weak credibility of the international collective security system could lead to limiting the role of United Nations instead of strengthening it, and I do not believe that anyone present in this Hall wishes to do that.

Mr. Yaroshevich (Belarus) (spoke in Russian): My delegation's statement is on agenda item 117 entitled, "United Nations reform: measures and proposals". The Belarusian delegation welcomes the management and organizational measures adopted to implement reform of the Secretariat and of the United Nations system overall. In 2006 Member States received the report of the Secretary-General on investing in the United Nations for a stronger Organization worldwide. The reactions from delegates led to the majority adoption of resolution 60/260, and Secretariat reform took a constructive turn.

We emphasize the need to continue efforts to broaden opportunities for the participation of suppliers from developing countries and States with transitional economies, in United Nations procurement. Reform of the procurement system must be aimed at establishing a transparent and balanced mechanism for procurement activity and the establishment of truly equal conditions for all Member States and economic actors.

The Belarusian delegation notes the progress achieved in implementing a global project on information technology in the use at Headquarters in New York, Vienna, Geneva and Nairobi of the best practices and technological achievements in the interest of Member States. We believe it is valuable to continue efforts to make appropriate use of technology in all six official languages of the United Nations. We also believe it is advisable to continue efforts to resolve staffing issues in the United Nations Office in Nairobi. It is necessary to adopt urgent measures to fill vacancies in the language services of the office. The United Nations office on the African continent must operate effectively, in particular bearing in mind the very important agenda of the Organization in Africa.

I wish to take this opportunity to note the absence of significant progress in the equitable representation of regional groups among United Nations Secretariat staff and management. Here, there are still serious divides. One has the feeling that the Western European and Others Group remains the main supplier of Secretariat staff, in particular for United Nations Headquarters. The most underrepresented region in Secretariat management has been and remains Eastern Europe. None of the efforts made by the Group of Eastern European States to broaden their representation have been greeted with responsive practical actions to correct the situation. It is a very strange situation, bearing in mind the high qualifications of specialists from our region.

With regard to system-wide reform, we would like to say a few words about institution building as it pertains to the Human Rights Council and the work to improve the system-wide coherence of United Nations efforts in the areas of promoting development, the environment and humanitarian assistance. The delegation of Belarus welcomes the beginning and first positive results of the work of the Human Rights Council, which the General Assembly established. On 16 November, the Third Committee adopted a draft Human Rights Council text (A/C.3/62/L.32, as amended) on institution-building and a set of guidelines regarding mandate-holders in the context of special procedures.

The Committee also supported Council decisions regarding country-specific universal periodic reviews. In that connection, we have great expectations for our ability to eliminate politicization and double standards in evaluating the human rights situations of Member States. Belarus would like to express its support for the decision regarding institution-building as it pertains to the Human Rights Council, especially as regards the establishment of a mechanism for universal periodic review and the streamlining of special procedures.

As a central element of reform in the system-wide coherence of the United Nations in the areas of development, the environment and humanitarian assistance, we believe that there is a need to maintain the key role of national Governments in the setting of priorities for the operational work of the United Nations in a given country. United Nations bodies can provide assistance in developing national development priorities, but they cannot impose them. In the work of reform, we need to rely on the intergovernmental status of the United Nations and the principle of multilateralism in addressing issues. What is unacceptable is the concept of a single country, United Nations representative, programme or agency determining the budget. We cannot support the idea of merging the operational activities of all bodies into a single United Nations agency. The adoption of such an approach would result in a diminished informed and speedy reaction by a single agency to the needs of recipient countries.

Belarus is also concerned about the dissatisfaction of several delegations with the quality of the United Nations interactions with the Bretton Woods institutions and bilateral donors. That has a negative impact on the predictability and stability of financial flows allocated for development.

In conclusion, the delegation of Belarus would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm its willingness to participate very actively in the work to develop effective ways to reform the United Nations.

Mr. Ale Magar (Nepal): Nepal highly appreciates the importance that the President of the General Assembly has given to the effective implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In the early years of this decade, the international community has made concrete commitments at various summits and conferences to advance socio-economic development in the world. In 2000, the Millennium Declaration gave us the MDGs. In 2001, the Brussels Programme of Action was agreed for the world's least developed countries. The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in 2002, produced the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation on sustainable development. In the same year, the international community agreed the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development. In 2003, the Almaty Programme of Action for landlocked developing countries was developed. Significantly, those summits and conferences showed us the way forward in the form of agreed commitments, goals and programmes. They also identified major principles, including the principles of global partnership and national ownership in the area of socio-economic development.

At the half-way mark to the target date for meeting those commitments, the report card on achieving them shows mixed progress. While some countries have partially made significant strides in achieving the MDGs, many others, particularly least developed countries, are still lagging behind in achieving them. Unless we accelerate our efforts now, the achievement of those Goals in the targeted framework will be a distant reality. We must therefore build on the achievements made thus far and strive to speed up their implementation in the days to come.

Nepal attaches great significance to the role of the United Nations system in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits and conferences to achieve socio-economic development. We support greater engagement by the Economic and Social Council in advancing the socio-economic agenda. We support system-wide coherence and emphasize the need for inter-agency coordination in the United Nations system for the successful implementation of the development outcomes. We encourage the regional commissions and the specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations to enhance their roles in strengthening country programmes for development.

The Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization can be expected to play more effective roles to implement the outcomes of the major summits and conferences in the social, economic and related fields. There is a need to further expand the role of those institutions and to reorient their actions in advancing socio-economic development in the world's poorer countries. In particular, their monitoring and follow-up mechanisms should be strengthened by improving indicators and developing a results-based matrix in the implementation of the outcomes of major summits and conferences.

The year 2008 will be a defining moment for the development agenda. We will be reviewing the progress made in the implementation of the MDGs and the outcome of the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development. In addition, the General Assembly will be undertaking a mid-term review of the Almaty Programme of Action for landlocked developing countries. At the twelfth Conference of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, to be held in Accra, we will also be addressing the challenges to development posed by globalization. Nepal attaches vital importance to those events and stresses that they provide renewed opportunities to further accelerate the implementation of our agreed goals and commitments in the area of development.

Nepal is committed to integrate the internationally agreed development goals, commitments and programmes into its national policies and programmes. We have already incorporated many of them into our national development plan. Our interim plan focuses on commitments to people-centred development, with a strong emphasis on good governance and poverty reduction. We hope that our development partners will provide an enhanced level of support to help us achieve our planned goals and targets.

The peace process in Nepal has made significant strides since the historic signing, in November 2006, of a comprehensive peace accord between the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). We are striving to establish a new Nepal that is committed to the fundamental values of democracy, social justice and people's progressive discourse.

The decade-long conflict came to an end with tangible achievements, such as empowerment of the masses and acceptance of a more inclusive and democratic framework for Nepal's various marginalized groups, including women, indigenous peoples, Madhesis, Dalits and people in the backward areas. We are now entering the phase of restructuring the State through elections to the Constituent Assembly, in which the elected representatives of the people will write their own constitution. Those developments are vital in creating an atmosphere conducive to paving way for better implementation of internationally agreed goals and commitments in the area of socio-economic development.

In conclusion, the international community cannot afford to be an apathetic spectator while millions of people in the world continue to languish in crippling poverty and exclusion. It has a special responsibility to lift them out of that morass.

Relegating poverty to history is possible, and it is within human reach if we act in concert. This solemn pledge cannot be achieved without renewed international political will, the significant scaling up of resources, sustained policies and programmes and committed national leadership. Together, we can make it happen. This is the lesson we have learned from these summits and conferences.

Along with all members of my delegation, I personally feel greatly honoured and privileged to be attending the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, although the journey here was a really difficult one. I was denied a United States visa about seven months ago, in spite of having been privileged enough to receive a written invitation from Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe to join a team working to establish the United Nations office to study electoral systems and functions. I think that the point of such an action and tendency on the part of the ruling class of the United States is definitely not obvious to people around the world, who have great respect for them. This is what has made people around the world think about locating United Nations Headquarters in a location that is easily accessible to all.

Ms. Al-Ghanim (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express, on behalf of the State of Kuwait, our deep appreciation for all the efforts made by the Secretary-General in his leadership of the Organization, efforts that are reflected in the various reports he has submitted for discussion during the current session. These reports contain, inter alia, his calls for the importance of implementing the provisions of the Millennium Declaration and not allowing it to conclude as a mere memory in the history of the Organization, thus affirming his concern to carry out his mandate fully.

Economic and social development is at the core of the goals and activities that the United Nations carries out. Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), should remain within the comprehensive framework of United Nations development activities. There is also need for the full implementation of the commitments agreed upon in all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, as well as for strengthening the international partnership for development, based on the recognition of national leadership and ownership of the development strategies of States.

Despite the fact that two years have elapsed since the 2005 World Summit, and seven years since the Millennium Summit, the challenges and dangers facing international peace and security, such as poverty, hunger, the spread of such dangerous and infectious diseases as AIDS and malaria, and the deterioration of the environment, are still present and threatening us. The first Follow-up International Conference on Financing of Development, scheduled to be held in Doha during the second half of 2008, provides a great opportunity to assess progress made in achieving the MDGs.

The State of Kuwait has made good progress in translating the commitments and resolutions of the 2005 World Summit into tangible results, and has also achieved the MDGs, particularly in the fields of education, health and advancing the role of women in society. It has devised policies capable of uplifting society and realizing more social and economic progress, as well as raising the standard of living per capita.

Given our absolute belief in human values and international solidarity, since gaining our independence, we have adopted a generous programme of assistance to developing countries. In 1961, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development was established making it the second oldest development fund in the world, after the International Monetary Fund. The Kuwait Fund has financed hundreds of infrastructure projects in over 100 countries, valued at more than $12 billion, thereby exceeding by more than double the percentage of gross national product (GNP) slated for development assistance and agreed upon internationally.

In this respect, it is incumbent upon developed countries to support the economic structures of developing ones and to adhere to their commitments by supplying them with adequate financial and technological assistance in order to reach the level of 0.07 per cent of their GNP as official development assistance. This aid should be provided within the framework of supporting the national strategies that the developing countries themselves have adopted.

Not only is it regrettable to see poverty, hunger and disease persist in developing countries, but it is also painful to see more than half the world's population live on less than $2 a day. This requires a serious look at the impediments to development in the developing countries and a real review of these impediments. Here, the State of Kuwait calls upon the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Bretton Woods institutions to reduce restrictions imposed on the exports of developing countries and to put forth a more just and equitable international trade system for the poor countries and the least developed ones, as well as to expand their participation in the decision-making process of the WTO and take into consideration the concerns of the poor and least developed countries.

We reiterate our commitment to the efforts being exerted to reduce the impact of the challenges facing our world today, particularly those dealing with the environment. The State of Kuwait follows with utmost concern the phenomenon of climate change. Despite confirmation by all the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concerning the difficulty of relying on one strategy alone to mitigate the impact of this phenomenon, we see that the focus is still centred on reducing the use of fossil fuel. Other factors resulting from human behaviour which pollute the air and cause a more severe pattern of climate change are ignored, including deforestation, urban expansion at the expense of agriculture land and the effects of nuclear energy. These are the main causes for the accumulation of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere and global warming.

Hopefully, the upcoming meeting in Bali, Indonesia, of States parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol will provide an opportunity to deal with this subject in detail. In this context, we would like to mention that the State of Kuwait recently donated $150 million at the presidential meeting in Riyadh of OPEC countries on the subject of energy and climate research.

The State of Kuwait will remain true to its promise to provide all the support and aid it can to its friends among the countries of the developing world. This results from our strong belief in the principle of sharing, with a view to achieving sustainable development and a more prosperous and stable life for all peoples of the world.

Ms. Aitimova (Kazakhstan): This year marks the midpoint for efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

While speaking about the achievement of these Goals, we note success in eliminating poverty and hunger in many countries. However, we need to coordinate multilateral action to achieve the MDGs for the creation of an enabling international economic environment to support developing countries' efforts to achieve sustained economic growth and development.

Kazakhstan is committed to its obligations to reach the MDGs and is constantly implementing its long-term development strategy, known as "Kazakhstan 2030". Our main objective in the area of economic policy is to ensure that Kazakhstan joins the ranks of the most competitive economies. To this end, we are implementing an industrial and innovative programme to diversify the economy, increase production of value-added goods and services and lay the foundation for a high-technology service economy.

It is widely acknowledged that, in order to achieve the MDGs, additional efforts have to be made to assure that countries with special needs will make the progress necessary under all MDG targets. The challenges and constraints of landlocked developing countries are enormous. It is recognized that high trade transaction costs, influenced by a lack of access to the sea and remoteness from major markets, represent the main cause of marginalization of the landlocked developing countries. That is why it is very important to ensure the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of major international conferences on trade and development in order for small and vulnerable economies to finally get a chance to enjoy the benefits and advantages promised at those conferences.

Kazakhstan believes that social development issues should continue to be among the priority items in the agendas of the principal bodies of the United Nations. Social development, the well-being of the population, poverty elimination, education and decent job creation are key elements for preserving global collective security and peace.

I would therefore like to commend the delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic for initiating the draft resolution entitled "World Day of Social Justice" (A/62/L.15), which was introduced today; Kazakhstan will be a sponsor. We believe that the annual celebration of the World Day of Social Justice will give an opportunity to societies and communities at all levels to draw attention once again to the importance of social development and the achievement of social justice around the world.

The delegation of Kazakhstan would like to commend the Secretary-General for his commitment to the creation of a more transparent and accountable Secretariat, with the highest levels of efficiency, competence and integrity. We believe that adequate institutional follow-up to the recommendations of the General Assembly and United Nations oversight bodies will transform in a positive manner the human resource base of the Organization, enhance its managerial decision-making tools and allow for better financial control, in addition to more accurate and timely management reporting. The highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity should have the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff, and due regard should also be given to the principle of equitable geographical distribution, in accordance with Article 101 of the Charter.

Our delegation welcomes the measures being undertaken by the Secretariat to improve the United Nations procurement system. As a new emerging donor country, Kazakhstan is interested in improving procurement opportunities for vendors from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and in diversifying the sources of goods and services. Over the last decades the competitiveness of the economies of these countries has increased considerably. In order to promote procurement activities in such countries the United Nations Procurement Service should periodically update its field procurement system, pay increased attention to the organization of seminars and training courses for local contractors and distribute information in the mass media in local languages.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/32 of 19 November 2002, I now call on the observer for the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Mrs. Filip (Inter-Parliamentary Union): I am pleased to address the General Assembly on the agenda item on the strengthening of the United Nations system. As we have done during previous sessions of the General Assembly, I would like to refer to this theme from the perspective of the developing parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations, and the benefits that it entails.

I would recall that we are referring here to a dimension that needs to be forged by parliaments and their members, and which has to be firmly rooted in the activities that parliaments carry out at the national level at home. It includes action by parliaments to contribute to and monitor international negotiations and debates at the United Nations, and to ensure national compliance with international norms and the rule of law. It also involves scrutinizing the activities of the United Nations and providing input into their deliberations.

As we have stressed previously, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is convinced that members of parliament can play an extremely important role in building national political support for international action. In the IPU's view, which is shared by many United Nations Member States, the United Nations stands to gain considerably by making sure that parliaments and their members have a full and undistorted understanding of major processes and activities under way at the United Nations.

It was with this understanding that, one year ago, the General Assembly adopted consensus resolution 61/6 on "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union". Since then, we have been focusing on the effective implementation of this bold and forward-looking resolution.

As a general recommendation, the resolution encourages the United Nations and the IPU to continue to cooperate closely in various fields, in particular peace and security, economic and social development, international law, human rights, democracy and gender issues, bearing in mind the significant benefits of cooperation between the two organizations, to which the report of the United Nations Secretary-General attests.

It is precisely because of the importance that the IPU attaches to this growing cooperation that we are devoting time and resources in order to ensure careful consideration and political guidance of this process. One of the measures that the IPU has already taken, therefore, has been the establishment of a dedicated parliamentary committee on United Nations affairs, in which all parliaments can participate and bring their contribution to the development of this parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations, and monitor its implementation.

Allow me to recall briefly some of the IPU's activities over this past year in support of strengthening the United Nations system, and in particular by following up on and implementing the provisions of General Assembly resolution 61/6. As a first point, the resolution encouraged the IPU to further strengthen its contribution to the work of the General Assembly, including its revitalization, as envisaged in the relevant 2006 and 2007 General Assembly resolutions, and in relation to the newly established United Nations bodies such as the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission.

Regarding the revitalization of the General Assembly, the IPU has had the opportunity to consult and engage with United Nations Member States on this very important topic. In light of the relevant experience residing within national parliaments in the area of modernizing and revitalizing legislative bodies, we have shared with the General Assembly a series of ideas, proposals and good practices and look forward to finding the most adequate ways to further contribute to this process.

Moreover, last month in Geneva, the IPU's new parliamentary Committee on United Nations Affairs heard from and engaged in a discussion with the President of the Human Rights Council, and will be seeking to define modalities whereby parliaments can best act in support of the Council, particularly in the context of the universal periodic review process. This will ensure accurate reporting on the implementation of international human rights instruments and help identify those areas where additional efforts are required.

In respect of the Peacebuilding Commission, the IPU has been closely following deliberations and action as they concern Burundi and Sierra Leone, and has been working with parliaments and authorities in both countries, with a view to building strong international support for the new legislative bodies as key components for sustainable peace and development.

As recommended by General Assembly resolution 61/6, the IPU is also assuming a more active role in support of the Economic and Social Council, particularly in the implementation of the new functions devolved to the Council by the 2005 World Summit. In this regard, the IPU has taken the lead in shaping a parliamentary dimension to the new Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) and, after voicing its commitment on the occasion of the launch of the DCF earlier this year, is now actively preparing for the first substantive session of the Forum next year.

Development cooperation will gradually be mainstreamed into the IPU's own regular programme of work. At the same, the IPU will be convening a representative group of members of parliament from both developed and developing countries, well versed in development cooperation issues, to participate in and contribute to the first DCF stakeholders forum next spring, thus providing direct input to the DCF. As a member of the DCF advisory board, the IPU will be consulting closely with the United Nations on the agenda and expected outcome of this meeting.

In paragraph 6 of resolution 61/6, the General Assembly welcomed the partnership agreement concluded between the United Nations Democracy Fund and the IPU and looked forward to growing cooperation in the realm of democracy and good governance.

Indeed, with United Nations Development Account funding, the IPU is currently implementing two projects: one is designed to enhance the capacity of parliaments in Africa to enact and revise national legislation so as to ensure compliance with international human rights standards; the other is in support of women parliamentarians in Burundi, which includes initiatives aimed at bringing women members of parliament from all political parties to work together for the promotion of women's rights in Burundi.

In a much broader context, the IPU and the United Nations Development Programme signed a new memorandum of understanding last week designed to expand their cooperation in support of democratic governance around the world in key areas such as national budget processes, action by parliaments in advancing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), poverty reduction strategies and greater parliamentarian involvement in development cooperation.

Last but not least, and as we had the opportunity to say very recently in this Hall (see A/62/PV.44), the IPU is proud to be part of a joint effort to promote an international day of democracy on a date which has been chosen to coincide with the anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy. The precepts and principles enshrined in that important political document, endorsed 10 years ago by national parliaments from around the globe, are as valid today as ever before. We look forward to working closely with the United Nations with a view to systematically integrating these core values into efforts to strengthen democracy worldwide.

A further recommendation of resolution 61/6 calls for the development of the annual parliamentary hearing at the United Nations and other specialized parliamentary meetings at the United Nations as joint United Nations-IPU events. Last week the IPU and the United Nations, through the Office of the President of the General Assembly, joined forces in convening a very successful parliamentary hearing on the theme of reinforcing the rule of law in international relations. The meeting attracted great interest from the national parliaments, which were well-represented. It also drew in many representatives from permanent missions, as well as senior United Nations officials and academia, for a substantive, interactive and politically charged debate.

This joint event succeeded in raising awareness among politicians around issues that are, or should be, high on the agenda of the United Nations, such as meeting commitments in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation, strengthening the international criminal justice regime and implementing the international global counter-terrorism strategy. The hearing resulted in a number of recommendations for the United Nations, as well as proposals for action by parliaments in support of United Nations efforts. The results of the hearing will be circulated shortly as an official document of the General Assembly.

Finally, General Assembly resolution 61/6 calls for closer involvement, as appropriate, of the IPU in the elaboration in system-wide strategies for consideration by the United Nations system and the United Nations system Chief Executive Board for Coordination, with a view to ensuring greater and more coherent support by parliaments to the work for the United Nations.

We have yet to determine the best ways to make this recommendation operational. However, it is evident to us that there are a number of areas that can allow for meaningful and mutually beneficial exchanges, such as delivering on the Millennium Development Goals, mobilizing political action in combating climate change and institutional gender mainstreaming, to name a few.

The IPU remains committed to further developing a strategic partnership with the United Nations. In so doing, we are guided by the considerations and proposals set forward in the IPU policy paper on the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and the world of parliaments, submitted for consideration in the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs and endorsed by IPU member parliaments on the occasion of the IPU's 117th Assembly, held in early October. This document has been submitted to the United Nations and should soon be circulated in the General Assembly as our further contribution to this agenda item.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/62/L.15, entitled "World Day of Social Justice". Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution, I would like to announce that since its introduction, the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/62/L.15: Brazil, Cyprus, Montenegro, Oman, the Philippines and Thailand.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/62/L.15 was adopted (resolution 62/10).

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda items 48, 116, 117 and 123.

Agenda item 13

The role of diamonds in fuelling conflict

Letter from the head of the delegation of the European Commission transmitting a report on the progress made towards the implementation of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (A/62/543 and Add. 1)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.16)

The Acting President: I have received a request from the observer for the European Community to be the first speaker in the debate on this item. Members will recall that the European Community is Chair of the Kimberley Process for 2007.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees, without setting a precedent, to hear the observer for the European Community, Chair of the Kimberley Process, as the first speaker in the debate on this item?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3208 (XXIX) of 11 October 1974, and the decision just taken, I now call on the observer of the European Community.

Mr. Kovanda (European Community): It is a real honour to have this opportunity to address the Assembly today, present a report on the work of the Kimberley Process and introduce the content of draft resolution A/62/L.16.

Since the Kimberley Process began, in the late 1990s, to better coordinate the international response to the phenomenon of conflict diamonds, we have seen a dramatic turn-around in the security situation in several diamond-producing countries, notably, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Implementation of the Kimberley Process has both contributed to and benefited from this progress in the real world. The only current case of conflict diamonds is that of Côte d'Ivoire, with trade in its diamonds being prohibited by Kimberley Process rules and the Security Council embargo.

More rough diamonds than ever before are being handled in accordance with Kimberley Process rules. An estimated 100,000 to 250,000 carats per annum are produced in Côte d'Ivoire, compared to the worldwide annual production of 176 million carats. Virtually all diamond producing and trading centres now implement the scheme. This year has seen significant seizures and prosecutions relating to conflict diamonds and smuggling. The Kimberley Process is therefore protecting the legitimate diamond industry, which plays a significant part in the economies of many countries, thereby giving many people a chance for a better life.

I would like to highlight two examples from this year of successful partnership in support of the Kimberley Process, namely, the cases of Ghana and Liberia.

Last year, in Gaborone, the Kimberley Process agreed a balanced package with Ghana, which was facing criticism regarding its national implementation. I am now pleased to report considerable improvement. Ghana is implementing a plan of action to control its informal sector, with the support of additional monitoring and technical assistance provided by the European Community, South Africa, the United States and a team led by a past Chairperson of the Kimberley Process to assess progress. The diamond industry, represented by the World Diamond Council, has helped to monitor exports. United Nations experts on Côte d'Ivoire sanctions have welcomed "the cooperation of the Kimberley Process and its efforts to encourage participating States to introduce further improvements in their internal control systems". (*A/62/543, annex, para. 8*)

They also recognized Ghana's "remarkable efforts that have enhanced the credibility of its internal control system and its diamond import/export regime" (*Ibid.*).

This year in Brussels, it was agreed to move to a system of risk-based monitoring of exports. Ghana continues to work on registering informal miners and estimating production levels, with the support of the

United States, the European Community and World Diamond Council.

Another good example of Kimberley Process partnership in action is the case of Liberia. Kimberley Process participants and observers — including the United States, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Canada, Sierra Leone and the World Diamond Council, as well as the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Development Programme — have all worked closely with the Government of Liberia to advise, train and equip the Government Diamond Office and its officials. In March, the Kimberley Process sent its third expert mission to Liberia, in close cooperation with the United Nations sanctions panel and supported by UNMIL, and found that Liberia did meet Kimberley Process requirements. Those findings were reported to the Security Council, which, by its resolution 1753 (2007) of 27 April 2007, decided to lift the diamond embargo. Liberia was admitted to the Kimberley Process on 4 May 2007. Several friends of Liberia are working with its Government to support Kimberley Process implementation.

Again, much remains to be done, but we believe this is a real milestone, laying the necessary foundation for diamonds to contribute to prosperity, rather than conflict, in West Africa.

Those two success stories continue the positive history of the Kimberley Process. Participants and observers have worked hard during the past year to strengthen the Kimberley Process, and have succeeded in tackling some of the outstanding challenges and in advancing standards, particularly with respect to trading and manufacturing centres.

Let me say a word on participation in the Kimberley Process, the continued interest in which clearly demonstrates its strength and credibility. The scheme has remained open, on a global and non-discriminatory basis, to all countries and regional economic integration organizations willing and able to fulfil its requirements. In addition to Liberia, we welcomed Turkey and the Republic of the Congo this year. We have worked with applicant countries to ensure that they are fully prepared to assume the responsibilities of Kimberley Process participation. Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Mali, Mexico and Tunisia attended the Brussels Plenary and affirmed their intention to join; while Bahrain, Cape Verde, Gabon, Swaziland and Zambia have all expressed an interest in future participation.

Civil society's involvement has been successfully broadened, with a record number of non-governmental organizations attending the Plenary meeting, including many from producer countries. It is to be hoped that this will lead to greater cooperation between Governments and civil society at the national level as well.

We have made good progress on monitoring. In the past four years, over 50 on-the-ground inspection visits have been carried out to Kimberley Process participants and applicants, each staffed entirely by volunteers, in a remarkable case of burden-sharing. Although the system of peer review is voluntary, in practice virtually all participants have demonstrated their openness to scrutiny and their willingness to improve. The second round of review visits has now been launched, with one such visit carried out already and a number under preparation.

At the beginning of this year, the Kimberley Process publicly released its production and trade statistics for the first time, to increase transparency and allow others to analyse the data. Statistics form an integral part of monitoring, and statistical analyses were prepared for all peer review visits over the past year. The Kimberley Process analysed the 2006 data, identifying a number of human errors, procedures to be corrected and issues for further work. All participants submitted the required statistical reports for 2005 and 2006, supported by continuing training opportunities made available by the Canadian Government.

We have also seen this past year increasing amounts of technical assistance and training in support of Kimberley Process implementation, as well as a willingness to identify where there are needs. Some countries have volunteered to increase their contributions to the Kimberley Process by service in working groups, training or by providing financing. That is a wonderful testimony to the spirit of cooperation among the three segments that constitute the Kimberley Process.

On the technical side, there has been continuing work to identify profiles of diamond production so that anomalies can be picked up. We expect further efforts over the medium term to place diamond identification techniques on a sound scientific basis.

Artisanal alluvial diamond mining accounts for a significant proportion of worldwide diamond production, but controlling it involves particular challenges, which are the focus of the working group of artisanal alluvial producers. That group has analysed the situation in each country with regard to artisanal alluvial production, assessing their controls in the light of Kimberley Process recommendations and considering progress, obstacles encountered and remaining challenges. It plans to develop further efforts on capacity building, traceability and tackling illicit cross-border trade.

With the Brussels Initiative on diamonds from Côte d'Ivoire, we believe there is a real possibility for the Kimberley Process to support a truly regional approach to diamonds in West Africa. In South America we also see promising signs of regional collaboration to address the challenges of controlling diamond production there.

A review of the Kimberley Process completed in November 2006 concluded that it had been effective in curbing the illicit trade in conflict diamonds. But it also noted that reforms were needed to adapt to new challenges and increasing demands. Many of those recommendations have been carried out, putting the Kimberley Process on a more solid footing: a compilation of rules and procedures, a new and more transparent website and the formalization of two of its working bodies.

At the same time, the Kimberley Process preserves its flexibility to respond pragmatically and appropriately to the different challenges it faces, through diplomatic messages, technical assistance, training and geological industry or statistical expertise. The Kimberley Process, as an innovative model of burden-sharing, has fostered a sense of ownership by participants and observers, many of whom have devoted considerable resources to strengthening implementation. Both human and financial resources have been deployed by a great many participants, through the provision of technical assistance, participation in working groups and in peer review teams.

The draft resolution before the Assembly today is not a short one. Indeed, it has grown to six pages, which is a testament to the many areas of activity in which the Assembly has been engaged in the past year and those which are planned for next year. I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to a technical change which will be introduced in the final text. The word "participants" will have a capital "P".

But thanks to the hard work of government, industry and civil society representatives around the world, the Kimberley Process remains one of the most successful and inspirational examples of how to break the link between natural resources and conflict. Although the availability of conflict diamonds is currently much reduced, the Kimberley Process is a vital tool of conflict prevention and deterrence.

We wish India, as the Chair for 2008, and Namibia, as Vice-Chair, every success. We assure them of our support, as we express our gratitude for the support of the past chairs of the Kimberley Process, who have all demonstrated great leadership — South Africa, Canada, the Russian Federation and Botswana.

I must also express my sincere gratitude to all those who have participated in this work over the past year, particularly the chairs of the working groups and committees, but also to all those in government, industry and civil society who have shown so much dedication in working together.

It remains for me, on behalf of the European Community, to express my heartfelt thanks to the United Nations, which has been a constant source of inspiration, support, expertise and encouragement to do better. We have worked closely with the sanctions committees and their experts in the cases of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, and look forward to ever broader and deeper cooperation with all the relevant parts of the United Nations system.

Mr. Outlule (Botswana): The delegation of Botswana extends its sincere appreciation to the delegation of the European Community in the person of Mr. Karel Kovanda, Chair of the 2007 Kimberley Process, for introducing an informative, clear, comprehensive — in a word, excellent — report under agenda item 13, as well as for introducing draft resolution A/62/L.16, as orally corrected.

We commend the European Community for providing sterling leadership during its tenure. In this connection, we welcome with great appreciation the substantial progress achieved in consolidating and strengthening the Kimberley Process, as called for by the recommendations of the Kimberley Process Three-

Year Review and the Gaborone Kimberley Process annual meeting held in 2006.

The Kimberley Process is critically important to the attainment of the universal objective of breaking the link between the illicit transaction of rough diamonds and armed conflict. It is a clear testimony of the phenomenal impact which the individual and combined efforts of Governments, industry and civil society can have on matters of international peace and security. In this respect, the Kimberley Process has and deserves our continuing resolute support and unwavering commitment.

We salute Member States for playing their part by actively participating and complying with the requirements of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. That is imperative for both the credibility and success of the Kimberley Process. The widest possible participation of the international community is essential for the effectiveness of the Kimberley Process. We therefore welcome the Member States that joined the Kimberley Process during 2007 and encourage others in a position to join to do so.

I wish to reiterate the fact that for most developing countries natural resources should be a blessing rather than a curse. Natural resources are a common heritage of the people and should be a source of hope for a better life and a better future.

In Botswana and in many other countries in our African region, we have begun translating this hope into reality by ensuring that all mineral rights are vested in the State. Over the years, the Government of Botswana consistently used and continues to use the revenue from minerals, especially diamonds, to provide education, health, housing, roads and telecommunications for the benefit of all citizens — in a word, development.

We recognize that there have been outbreaks of conflict in some parts of the developing world, particularly in Africa, in which a diamond, a natural resource of great beauty, was illicitly used to finance or fuel conflict, the so-called conflict diamonds.

These so-called conflict diamonds continue to be a matter of serious concern to Botswana and the international community as a whole. However, we are pleased that as a result of the strong support by the international community and initiatives such as the Kimberley Process, significant strides continue to be made to halt and prevent the illicit diamond trade.

Today, we, the diamond producers, exporters, importers and consumers, have committed ourselves to upholding the highest standards set for diamond trade, not only to safeguard against illicit diamonds entering legitimate trade, but also to ensure that never again will diamonds be a source of such human destruction and suffering as was the case in a number of countries not too long ago.

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme has been effectively transformed into a credible and globally recognized tracking system for rough diamonds, enabling the diamond industry to regain legitimacy as well as to promote greater transparency in the diamond trade. We applaud all Member States that have provided leadership in the fight to eliminate the illicit transaction of rough diamonds by extending technical support to other countries to fully implement the requirements of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme.

It is heartening to note that even though a large majority of diamonds have always been from legitimate sources, today more than ever before, diamonds have become a source of funding for social progression and economic development in more countries, including some countries in Africa that were affected by conflict.

We are pleased that Liberia, a country that has emerged from one of the most brutal conflicts, is now counted among the countries meeting the basic minimum requirements of the Kimberley Process. We are optimistic that with the continued support of the international community, Liberia will progress on a steadfast path to full post-conflict recovery and sustainable economic development. In the not-too-distant future, resources, including diamonds, will undoubtedly contribute immensely to this process.

Commendable progress has also been made in other countries, such as Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. To this end, my delegation is particularly pleased that diamond resources are now increasingly being channelled towards funding critical socio-economic benefits such as education, health facilities, combating HIV/AIDS, providing clean water, roads, electricity and numerous other developmental challenges that developing countries confront.

Botswana and a number of other countries can indeed attest to the good that diamonds can do. For the past four decades diamonds have been our lifeline and not only do they continue today to be the mainstay of our economy, but they promise to do so in the foreseeable future. A combination of good governance, visionary leadership, prudent management and diamonds catapulted Botswana from being a least developed country to its current middle income status. And the proceeds from diamonds remain the critical revenue base for causing all our social and economic indicators to advance. It is for that reason that Botswana will always go the extra mile to protect the integrity of diamonds and their continued appeal to consumers.

Botswana fully supports draft resolution A/61/L.16, as orally corrected. The draft resolution reaffirms the unique relationship between the United Nations system and the Kimberley Process and reiterates the validity of continued cooperation. It calls for the full implementation of other related Security Council measures and General Assembly resolutions. That will help bring better coordination and sharper focus to the linkage between the work of the Kimberley Process and that of the United Nations in its endeavour to maintain international peace and security.

The provisions of the draft resolution endorse the decisions of the Brussels Plenary that highlight the achievements of the Kimberley Process and the challenges ahead. It sets out a road map on how to address those challenges and to build on best practices. That forms the basis of the mandate for the 2008 Chair of the Kimberley Process.

The delegation of Botswana takes this opportunity to assure both the incoming Chair of the Kimberley Process, India, and the Vice-Chair, Namibia, of our continued goodwill, support and cooperation in the coming years.

We encourage all Member States to support the adoption of draft resolution A/62/L.16, as orally corrected, which embodies our unwavering commitment to breaking the link between the illicit transaction of rough diamonds and armed conflict, as a contribution to the prevention and settlement of conflicts.

In conclusion, Botswana attaches the utmost importance to this matter because it is crucial to our ability to reassure consumers, as we begin this season of goodwill and giving, that they can buy, give and wear diamonds with equanimity, in the full knowledge that they have been certified conflict-free by the Kimberley Process and that in buying such diamonds they are contributing to the development of many developing countries, including my own country, Botswana.

Mr. Rodger Young (United States of America): The United States is pleased to be a sponsor of the draft resolution A/62/L.16, on the role of diamonds in fuelling conflict.

The international community has much to be proud of when it comes to the efforts of the Kimberley Process. It is a tribute to the Kimberley Process that conflict diamonds today make up only a small percentage of the world's diamond market. With the Kimberley Process, the international community now has the tools to head off future conflict and promote stability and security in diamond-rich regions of the world.

The unique manner in which Governments, the diamond industry and civil society have worked together in the Kimberley Process to monitor and control the rough diamond trade should stand as a model as we confront other sources of conflict. This multi-stakeholder effort demonstrates what can be accomplished when Governments join forces with the private sector and non-governmental organizations.

We take this opportunity salute our European Community colleagues who have led the Kimberley Process in 2007 to encourage the major diamond trading and manufacturing centres to strengthen internal controls over the diamond markets. European leadership also positioned the Kimberley Process to address the ongoing problem of diamond smuggling from Côte d'Ivoire through neighbouring West African countries. We are confident that those initiatives, launched under the European leadership, will remain the hallmark of Kimberley Process efforts in the years ahead.

We were also particularly pleased, in 2007, to welcome Liberia as a participant in the Kimberley Process. The Liberian Government moved quickly in the past year to capitalize on international support. Liberia set up a credible diamond monitoring system to enable the lifting of Security Council sanctions on its diamond exports and to participate in the Kimberley Process. We appreciate the long way Liberia has come, from an era when diamonds financed brutal atrocities to the point today, when diamonds are a positive force and are playing a positive role in the country's economic reconstruction.

The United States also welcomes the efforts of donor countries to provide technical assistance to help Kimberley Process participants strengthen their internal controls. We believe that one of the best means of supporting stability and preventing renewed conflict in diamond-producing areas is to foster Kimberley Process controls at the same time that we support development opportunities for mining communities.

We look forward to working closely with India as it assumes the Chair and with Namibia as it assumes the vice-chairmanship of the Kimberley Process in 2008.

Mr. Malhotra (India): I am grateful for this opportunity to address the General Assembly on agenda item 13, "The role of diamonds in fuelling conflict".

Many developing countries are vitally dependent on their natural resources for achieving their development goals. Yet, ironically, those very natural resources have served to cause and prolong conflict in several countries as a result of the misuse of wealth generated from such resources. Diamonds in particular have played a significant role in that regard. In addition to financing devastating armed conflicts, the illicit trade in rough diamonds also impacts negatively on the legitimate international trade in diamonds. It is therefore crucial to end the trade in illicit diamonds.

The issue of natural resources fuelling conflict should not be seen solely through the narrow prism of peace and security. Instead, efforts to address the issue must be made through the perspective of an overall development agenda. Moreover, such efforts need to focus not only on the supply side, but on all parts of the supply chain, including processing, trading and purchase by the consumer.

In that regard, the Kimberley Process is an innovative and useful mechanism. It approaches the problem not merely at the level of extraction, but also from the standpoint of processing and trading. Its Certification Scheme has been particularly effective in validating and regulating the production of rough diamonds and their trade. It fully affirms the sovereignty of States in the Process and is driven by voluntary efforts by its participants. In addition, it has an inclusive approach that extends to the entire international community, including producing, exporting and importing countries, as well as the diamond industry and civil society. For those reasons, major diamond trading and processing countries such as India have engaged constructively and actively with the Process and support its full implementation.

We welcome the decisions taken at the Plenary of the Kimberley Process held in Brussels earlier this month, which are reflected in the Brussels communiqué. In particular, we support the need for strong government oversight of rough diamond trading and manufacturing, with greater internal control.

We would also like to convey our appreciation to the European Commission, as Chair of the Kimberley Process during 2007, for its efforts during the year towards strengthening the implementation of the Process and its initiative in the publication of diamond production and trade statistics. We welcome the re-admission of the Republic of Congo to the Kimberley Process and the joining by Liberia and Turkey as new participants.

We would like to congratulate Ghana on its efforts in the implementation of Kimberley Process. We support continuing peer review visits, and would also like to thank the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for its invitation for a visit next year. We also look forward to the implementation of the Brussels initiative on diamonds from Côte d'Ivoire.

As Chair of the Kimberley Process for 2008, India will strengthen the Kimberley Process mechanism by building on previous traditions and conventions, and will strive to implement the decisions taken during the Brussels Plenary through the active engagement of the Kimberley Process working groups and committees. India will continue to extend assistance to Kimberley Process members to build effective internal controls on the production, processing and trade of rough diamonds. This is crucial for ensuring growth of the legitimate diamond trade and protection of the livelihoods of so many people around the globe. We look forward to receiving the support and cooperation of all participants of the Kimberley Process, civil society and industry representatives.

In conclusion, while mechanisms like the Kimberley Processes play an important role in breaking the link between illicit transactions in rough diamonds and armed conflict, a lasting solution would have to involve the effective and consensual exploitation of natural resources in a way that benefits society as a whole.

Mr. Mbuende (Namibia): My delegation is pleased to sponsor and support draft resolution A/62/L.16, on the role of diamonds in fuelling conflict. In taking up this draft resolution, the General Assembly once again recognizes the reality that trade in conflict diamonds remains a crucial factor in prolonging conflicts in many parts of the world. Most important, by breaking the link between the legitimate diamond trade and conflict diamonds, the General Assembly is making a clear statement that clean diamonds can contribute to prosperity and development in many parts of the world. We hope that similar efforts will be made so that other natural resources such as oil, timber, gold, copper, water and land do not fuel conflicts, and that, if they do, the General Assembly will rise to the occasion and take appropriate action.

For Africa, diamonds are one of the major natural resources with which the continent is endowed. About 65 per cent of the world's diamonds, worth over $8 billion, are sourced from Africa every year. In Southern Africa, the diamond industry employs more than 38,000 people; at the global level about 10 million people are either directly or indirectly supported by the diamond industry.

From its own experience, Namibia owes its advances in development to the exploitation of mineral resources, especially diamonds, which account for about 70 per cent of all our export earnings, 12 per cent of our gross domestic product and 8 per cent of Government revenue. Last year alone, Namibia produced diamonds worth approximately $700 million. For our people, every Namibian diamond purchased on the world market thus represents food on the table, the provision of essential social services such as health care, and the construction of more schools, hospitals and roads to connect our rural communities.

It is against this background that Namibia wishes to reiterate its full commitment to the Kimberley Process. We believe that the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme guarantees transparency in marketing our diamonds. It also provides a valuable platform for cooperation among diamond-producing countries.

Through the multilateral efforts of the Kimberley Process we have made remarkable progress in a relatively short period of time to control the flows of conflict diamonds, including through increased Government oversight of the industry. We encourage donors to continue helping the diamond-producing countries of the Kimberley Process, which need to build and strengthen their capacity to implement controls and monitor the diamond trade from mine to export.

As a diamond-producing country, Namibia has put in place a robust and comprehensive regulatory regime in order to protect the integrity of its diamond industry from conflict diamonds. In addition, a number of Government agencies, including the Diamonds Inspectorate in the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the Protected Resources Unit of the Namibia police, have been established and are specifically charged with protecting our diamonds from smuggling and other illicit activities. In this way, Namibia is contributing to international efforts aimed at curbing the flow of conflict diamonds and at ensuring international peace and security.

My delegation wishes to thank the European Commission for the leadership it has provided to the Kimberley Process this year. We also wish to congratulate India on assuming the chairmanship of the Kimberley Process for 2008. As Vice-Chair, Namibia looks forward to a year of continued close cooperation.

Ms. Hulan (Canada): My delegation welcomes this opportunity to share views on the important issue of the role of diamonds in fuelling conflict. Canada remains a strong supporter the Kimberley Process, which after just four years of operation has increased accountability, transparency and effective Government regulation of the trade in rough diamonds. In doing so, it has had remarkable success in breaking the link between the global diamond trade and armed conflict.

Allow me to begin by extending my delegation's sincere thanks to the European Commission for coordinating the resolution before us today, and for its successful tenure as Chair of the Kimberley Process over the past year. A number of important improvements to the Process have been made under the Commission's stewardship, including implementation of many of the recommendations of the three-year review, the near completion of a first round of peer review visits and the adoption of the Brussels

Declaration on internal controls and the Brussels initiative on diamonds from Côte d'Ivoire. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the Republic of Congo, Liberia and Turkey into the Kimberley Process.

Finally, my delegation extends a warm welcome to India as incoming Kimberley Process Chair, and our congratulations go to Namibia on its selection as Vice-Chair for 2008. We look forward to working with both delegations to further strengthen the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme in the coming year.

Among the achievements of the past year, perhaps none has been more important than the impressive progress Ghana has made in improving its system of internal controls over rough diamonds. Canada commends the constructive and transparent manner in which Ghana has engaged the Kimberley Process, and we welcome the commitment the Government has shown to completing reform of its internal controls. We recognize that, in doing so, Ghana is not only bringing itself into compliance with the Kimberley Process, but is also making an important contribution to ensuring that illicit diamonds from Côte d'Ivoire do not enter the legitimate global trade.

Equally, Canada welcomes Liberia's participation in the Kimberley Process and commends Liberia's efforts to establish a rigorous set of import and export controls for rough diamonds. Following the removal of the United Nations diamond sanctions that had been in place for six years, Liberia's first official diamond exports were made in September 2007. Liberia's progress is testament not only to the Government's commitment, but also to the Kimberley Process participants and observers who have assisted Liberia's efforts to eliminate its conflict diamond trade. We offer our encouragement to Liberia as it continues to refine its system of controls over rough diamonds.

Canada also welcomes the emerging regional cooperation aimed at stemming the illicit cross-border movement of rough diamonds in West Africa and South America. Regional harmonization and cooperation is one of the most promising means of strengthening the international community's capacity to monitor and control the movement of rough diamonds, particularly where porous borders make doing so a challenge. We encourage participants to strengthen regional cooperation in other parts of the world as well.

One of the unique features of the Kimberley Process, and indeed one of the key contributors to its success, has been the innovation and flexibility that it has shown through rigorous self-examination and improvement during its first four years. This practice and the spirit that guides it must be maintained if the Process is to be successful in identifying and closing the gaps that remain in its system of control over rough diamonds.

In particular, the Process will need to be steadfast in taking timely and effective action to address emerging crises. One of its most important innovations in this regard has been the development of a comprehensive and credible system of peer review to monitor the implementation of Kimberley Process standards and practices in participant countries. In this spirit, we encourage the Process and its members to examine the possibility of further developing its capacity to expose and address new cases of trading in conflict diamonds that emerge in the future.

In this regard, Canada recognizes the crucial role that nongovernmental organization observers — particularly that of Global Witness and Partnership for Africa Canada — play in the monitoring, and the important contributions that those organizations have made to the credibility and accountability of the Process. We are very pleased that the number of civil society organizations participating in the Kimberley Process is expanding. Canada urges all participants to continue working constructively with these organizations, and to recognize their important contribution in support of our shared objectives.

The Kimberley Process is making a major contribution to breaking the link between rough diamonds and armed conflict. It stands as a testament to what can be achieved through the innovative and systematic collaboration of Governments, the United Nations, the private sector and civil society. However, here in the United Nations, we have for years approached the larger issue of natural resources and conflict on an ad hoc, case by case, resource by resource basis. Canada strongly encourages the United Nations to consider a more comprehensive approach to its work in this area. By examining the intersection between the exploitation of natural resources and the persistence, and in some cases intensification, of armed conflicts, we believe the international community will be better placed to find durable solutions to these types of conflicts.

Mr. Maksimychev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Our delegation feels that the Kimberley Process has functioned well and has, to date, made substantial progress in achieving its basic purposes, including discharging tasks set for it by decisions of the Security Council and other United Nations bodies. That progress has helped significantly to strengthen its authority. We would like to commend our colleagues from the European Union for successfully chairing the Process this year, in particular, for holding the plenary meeting of the Kimberley Process in Brussels from 5 to 8 November of this year and for preparing the draft resolution on conflict diamonds for the sixty-second session of the General Assembly.

Today, the Kimberley Process is a very complex body, implementing a whole host of functions that are sensitive for its participants. Based on this fact, we believe it essential to increase the efforts of the international community to further develop the mechanisms of the Kimberley Process and its legal basis.

It is obvious that growth in the effectiveness of the Kimberley Process directly depends on ensuring the universality of its membership and agreement on the actions of all its working bodies. In view of the significance of the diamond business and its specific features, it is important to broaden the circle of participants and observers to the Kimberley Process. In this regard, we welcome the decisions of Liberia, Turkey and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to become full-fledged participants.

The draft resolution that we are to adopt today reflects the substantive progress and momentum achieved under the Kimberley Process in 2007. At the same time, we are convinced that much still remains to be done to increase effectiveness in implementing the mandates of the Kimberley Process, in particular, in revitalizing work to carry out decisions to review one of its main foundations, namely, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. We consequently support efforts to implement recommendations of the plenary sessions in Gaborone and Brussels, which are aimed at strengthening control measures in trading, polishing and manufacturing centres.

The peer review mechanism known as the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme is a very important instrument of the Process. We believe that in planning and carrying out review visits it is especially vital to focus efforts on countries with problems in implementing the minimum requirements of the Certification Scheme as well as on those requiring technical assistance.

For our part, Russia, in its State agencies and in the diamond sector and civil society, is prepared to continue to do its utmost within the United Nations, the Kimberley Process, other international organizations and forums, as well as on a bilateral basis, to prevent the use of rough diamonds to fuel international conflicts.

In accordance with the decision of the plenary in Gaborone in 2006, Russia was appointed the Chair of the Kimberley Process committee on rules and procedures. All of our efforts in the past year have been aimed at developing new and improved operational rules and procedures, with the understanding that they need to be aimed at resolving timely committee items and should be transparent and comprehensible, not only to participants to the Process, but to the broader public.

Like others who have spoken on this agenda item, we would also like to wish India as the new Chair of the Kimberley Process and Namibia as the new Vice-chair success in their posts for the coming year.

In conclusion, it is obvious that, for technical reasons, Russia is not listed among the sponsors of draft resolution A/62/L.16. We would like to state that we have now joined the sponsors and we would ask for that to be reflected in the official record.

Mr. Kemp (Australia): Australia is a strong supporter of the Kimberley Process. After just four years of operation, the Kimberley Process has increased transparency and facilitated effective government regulation of the trade in rough diamonds. As such, it has had a remarkable success in breaking the link between this trade and armed conflict, and is evidence of what can be achieved through the collective efforts of Governments, the United Nations, the private sector and civil society.

Australia wishes to fully align itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Canada. Australia also wishes to co-sponsor the resolution on this item.

Mr. Antonio (Angola): Allow me first to congratulate the European Community on a job well done during its chairmanship of the Kimberley Process this year. That has resulted in a gradual consolidation of the Process, greater transparency through the publication of more complete series of production and trade statistics, and better overall information about the diamond industry throughout the world. I also commend the chairmanship for the presentation of the annual report and the European Commission for its leadership during the consultations on the draft resolution now before the Assembly (A/62/L.16), which my country fully supports. I wish a very successful mandate to India as forthcoming Chair and to Namibia as forthcoming Vice-Chair.

Since its creation, the Kimberley Process has made a valuable contribution to peace and stability, especially in Africa. Indeed, the rules introduced by the Process have tightened control over both the production and the flow of diamonds in the international market. The establishment of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme for raw diamonds, which went into effect in January 2003, and the commitment of the Scheme's members to its implementation, as well as the sanctions adopted by the Security Council, relating primarily to several African countries, were decisive factors contributing to the end of conflicts, including in my country, Angola, where a war was being waged over and funded by so-called blood diamonds. The five-year peace in Angola is, in effect, a good indication of the success of the Kimberley Process and, in particular, of the Certification Scheme.

African countries account for approximately 65 per cent of the global production of diamonds, which amounts to an estimated $8.4 billion a year. The economies of some African countries are based on the production of and the trade in diamonds; in others, diamonds are a key contributor to the well-being of the population and the development of infrastructure. Therefore, the need to protect and properly manage such a valuable mineral resource cannot be underestimated.

Now that the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme is legally valid in more than 45 countries, that instrument needs to be supported by an internal control system in each country. Such a system must be developed in order to give real meaning to each certificate issued by the relevant national authority. Therefore, there is a strong case for building the capacity of regulatory and enforcement authorities, particularly in Africa, which is home to the main producing countries.

In that connection, Angola, one of the pioneers in launching the Kimberley Process, has created the Diamond Inspection and Safety Corps, a specialized force responsible for the safety of Angolan diamonds. In particular, it is responsible for ensuring their safe transportation to Luanda from mining project sites or buying centres in the interior. The force also controls security at sorting facilities in Luanda and is present at every stage as diamond parcels are opened, sorted, valued and repackaged for export.

In order to constantly improve the implementation of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme and to update the country's mining industry so that it is in line with the dynamic of the world economy, two multisectoral ministerial commissions have been established in Angola by presidential decree. They are tasked primarily with reviewing existing national mining legislation and, in particular, ensuring the protection of national diamond resources.

Those measures have been instrumental in the progress made by the Angolan diamond sector over the past five years of peace. Production nearly doubled, from 5 million carats in 2002 to almost 9.5 million carats in 2006. Gross income from diamond sales nearly doubled as well, from $638 million in 2002 to $1.2 billion in 2006. During the same period, Government revenue increased threefold, from $45 million to $165 million.

At the international level, the Republic of Angola played a pivotal role in the establishment, in Luanda in November 2006, of the African Diamond Producing Countries Association, whose objective is to coordinate policies and strategies for the sustained and durable development of the African diamond industry.

As rightly stated in paragraph 13 of the draft resolution before the Assembly, Angola is Chair of the Working Group of the Kimberley Process of Artisanal Alluvial Producers, which was established at a plenary meeting of the Process held in Gaborone, Botswana, in November 2006, as a result of successive decisions taken at previous plenary meetings held in Gatineau, Canada, and Moscow, Russia, in 2004 and 2005, respectively. As members are aware, the Working Group's mission is to ensure the implementation of the recommendations set out in the Moscow Declaration with regard to improving internal control over artisanal and small-scale exploration for alluvial diamonds and promoting the exchange of good practices.

In Angola, artisanal exploration for diamonds is legally allowed only in specific areas where mechanized mining is not commercially viable. A license is mandatory and must be obtained before artisanal mining activity is allowed. Artisanal diamond miners — who in Angola are known as *garimpeiros* — must be 18 or older, must possess a valid identification document and must have been a resident for at least 10 years in the country or adjacent area where mining activity is to be undertaken.

Given the strategic importance of diamonds, particularly for certain African countries, it is important that particular attention be accorded to this area by the Governments of both their producers and their main importers. The fight against illicit diamond trafficking and fraud should therefore be an ongoing commitment on the part of all involved. In the context of combating the illicit cross-border trafficking of diamonds, bilateral, subregional and regional cooperation through economic clusters should continue to be the focus of consultations among interested parties with a view to reducing or eradicating that crime.

Judging by the progress made thus far by the Kimberley Process, we can attain the objectives set by the Assembly when it added this item to its agenda. That would make an important contribution to breaking the link between illicit transaction of rough diamonds and armed conflicts — a goal that we can achieve through sustained efforts and concerted action.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Before we proceed further, I should like to consult the Assembly with a view to proceeding immediately to consider the draft resolution contained in document A/62/L.16. In that connection, since the draft resolution was circulated only today, it would be necessary to waive the relevant provision of rule 78 of the rules of procedure. The relevant provision of rule 78 reads as follows:

> "As a general rule, no proposal shall be discussed or put to the vote at any meeting of the General Assembly unless copies of it have been circulated to all delegations not later than the day preceding the meeting".

Unless I hear any objections, I shall take it that the Assembly agrees with the proposal.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/62/L.16, entitled "The role of diamonds in fuelling conflict: breaking the link between the illicit transaction of rough diamonds and armed conflict as a contribution to prevention and settlement of conflicts", as orally corrected.

Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to announce that, since the introduction of the draft resolution, the following countries have joined the sponsors of A/62/L.16: Angola, Australia, Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Moldova, Montenegro, Russian Federation, Serbia, Singapore and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

I would also like to inform members that Japan has withdrawn from sponsorship of draft resolution A/62/L.16.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/62/L.16, as orally corrected?

Draft resolution A/62/L.16, as orally corrected, was adopted (resolution 62/11).

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of the agenda item?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 76 (*continued*)

Report of the International Criminal Court

Draft resolution A/62/L.13

The Acting President: Members will recall that the Assembly held its debate on this agenda item at its 42nd and 43rd plenary meetings, on 1 November 2007. In connection with this item, the Assembly now has before it a draft resolution issued as document A/62/L.13.

I give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands to introduce draft resolution A/62/L.13.

Mr. Majoor (Netherlands): I have the honour this afternoon to introduce under the agenda item entitled, "Report of the International Criminal Court" draft resolution A/62/L.13 entitled, "Report of the International Criminal Court".

In addition to the nearly 100 countries mentioned in document A/62/L.13, the following countries have indicated their wish to be included as sponsors of the draft resolution: Afghanistan, Chad, Chile, Guinea, Haiti, Madagascar, Montenegro and Saint Kitts and Nevis. This brings the total number of sponsors for this draft resolution to 107.

On 1 November, the President of the International Criminal Court presented the third annual report of the International Criminal Court to this body. We had a very constructive and in-depth debate then, and I do not want to repeat that discussion here today. Allow me though to highlight a few elements.

The establishment of the Court was the most significant development in recent years in our long and ongoing struggle to eradicate impunity. In the few years that it has been operational, the Court has, as was stated by the United Nations Secretary-General in his statement marking the fifth anniversary of the Court, established itself as the centrepiece of a system of international criminal justice.

In that regard, we will continue to strive for universal adherence to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We are therefore very pleased to welcome the countries that have recently become a party to the Rome Statute and it is our sincere hope that others will join soon.

The International Criminal Court's annual report, as well as the debate in the General Assembly a few weeks ago, underlined the important role the International Criminal Court plays in our common multilateral system that aims to end impunity and to establish the rule of law, to promote and encourage respect for human rights and to restore and maintain international peace and security. It is our firm conviction that sustainable peace cannot be achieved, if perpetrators of the most serious crimes are not brought to justice. Peace and justice are thus complementary requirements.

The President of the International Criminal Court in his address to the General Assembly stressed the fact that cooperation between the Court and the United Nations and cooperation by States and international and regional organizations are fundamental to an effectively and efficiently functioning Court — especially in relation to the arrest and surrender of accused persons, the provision of evidence, the relocation of witnesses and the enforcement of sentences. We are pleased that the United Nations has again assisted the Court over the last year in its endeavours through implementation of the Relationship Agreement. We also welcome the assistance provided so far by not only by States parties but also by non-States parties, and I call on all States to continue to support the Court's efforts. The continued support of civil society deserves to be mentioned as well.

The draft resolution before us today serves three main objectives: first, to provide political support for the International Criminal Court as an organization, for its mandate and its aims, as well as for the work it carries out; secondly, to underline the importance of the relationship between the International Criminal Court and the United Nations, upon which the two organizations continue to build, on the basis of the Relationship Agreement and lastly, it serves to remind States and international and regional organizations of the need to cooperate with the International Criminal Court as it carries out its tasks.

The Netherlands hopes that this draft resolution will be adopted by consensus and that it will lead to even greater support for the International Criminal Court in its fight against impunity and its attempts to hold those accused of very serious crimes accountable for their actions.

The Acting President: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/62/L.13. Before giving the floor to the speaker in explanation of vote before the vote, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): The concerns of the United States about the Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court (ICC) are well known. They include the ICC's claimed authority to assert jurisdiction over nationals not parties to the Rome Statute, including United States nationals, and the lack of adequate oversight over the ICC's Prosecutor, who may initiate cases without first seeking approval of the Security Council.

Accordingly, the United States disassociates itself from the consensus on this draft resolution. In spite of its concerns, the United States made a genuine effort to work with the draft resolution's sponsors to find common ground. Over the past three years, we have stated clearly, consistently and repeatedly, that we respect the rights of other States to become parties to the Rome Statute, and we have asked in return that other States respect our decision and right not to become a party. Our efforts to find common ground reflect our belief that while parties and non-parties to the Rome Statute have different views about the ICC, they should nonetheless be able to work together in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation to advance their common interests in promoting accountability for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

We are disappointed and surprised to find again this year that the sponsors of this draft resolution do not appear prepared to move forward in this spirit. Again this year, the sponsors have declined to include language in the draft resolution that expresses respect for, or even recognition of, the decisions of some States not to become parties to the Rome Statute. The sponsors of the draft resolution apparently view such a basic expression of respect as inconsistent with their aspiration of universal membership for the ICC, as if it is, in fact, somehow illegitimate for a State to choose not to become party to the Rome Statute. By their actions, they have made clear that the pragmatic modus vivendi that we have been seeking to promote is simply not working.

As a historical matter, we find some irony in this current emphasis on universality. During the Rome Conference the United States worked tirelessly to convince delegations of the wisdom of an approach to the ICC that would have permitted more States to join the Court. This appeal was rejected in favour of a narrower approach embraced by a smaller group of like-minded States.

As a practical matter, we find this position to be counterproductive. The ICC is unlikely ever to attain universal membership. Yet the same ICC supporters who refuse to express respect for the decisions of non-parties unabashedly seek assistance for the ICC from non-parties, and seek support of non-parties for assistance to the ICC by the United Nations and other international organizations. They seem to think that the relationship with non-parties can be a one-way proposition, in which ICC parties only take and give nothing in return.

Such an unbalanced approach is untenable. Meaningful assistance from non-parties is far less likely to be forthcoming, and cooperative efforts to advance the fight against impunity are made far more difficult, so long as ICC supporters continue to disrespect the positions of non-parties. We will get further together by agreeing to disagree about the ICC and cooperating on matters of common interest than we will through the continuation of efforts by ICC parties to convert those States who have legally and legitimately exercised their right not to join.

We also note with concern the statement in the draft resolution encouraging States parties to the Rome Statute to take the interests, needs for assistance and mandate of the ICC into account when relevant matters are being discussed in the United Nations. To the extent that by this statement the General Assembly seeks to encourage a particular group of Member States to influence the deliberations or decisions of other organs of the United Nations, we consider it an inappropriate interference in the work of those organs.

More generally, we are concerned by the suggestion that, as a matter of general principle, it is the responsibility of the United Nations to facilitate the work of the ICC. In this regard, we note the claim of the President of the ICC that the so-called enforcement pillar of the Rome Statute, which includes the arrest and surrender of suspects and the protection of victims and witnesses, has been reserved to States and, by extension, international organizations. This seems to us to misperceive the relationship between the ICC and the United Nations.

It is, of course, true that in some cases the work of the ICC and the work of the United Nations may be complementary. We note in this regard the decision of the Security Council to refer to the ICC the situation in Darfur. But this will not necessarily be true in every case. It is for the Security Council to decide whether there are circumstances in which assisting the ICC in enforcing its decisions will advance the Council's efforts to address threats to international peace and security. In such cases, the relevant question is whether assisting the ICC will advance the Security Council's mandate and interests, not whether such assistance will advance the ICC's mandate and interests. Particularly where assistance sought by the ICC may involve difficult and dangerous tasks that ICC States parties are unwilling or unable to carry out on their own, there will be reasons to question whether the Council should agree that the United Nations should shoulder such burdens.

We welcome the addition of language in this year's draft resolution that requests the Secretary-General to report on assistance the United Nations has provided to the ICC and, in particular, on the expenses incurred in connection with such assistance and the reimbursements received for such expenses. This report will provide overdue and much needed transparency with respect to such assistance. We expect that it will include information about assistance to the ICC provided by United Nations peacekeeping and other field missions as well as assistance provided by the United Nations Secretariat in New York and elsewhere in the United Nations system, and will address the nature, extent and costs of such assistance, as well as the reimbursements received by the United Nations.

We note in this regard that General Assembly resolution 58/318 provides that all expenses incurred by the United Nations in connection with such assistance shall be paid in full to the Organization. This decision underscores the importance of respecting the separate status of the two organizations. We look forward to receiving the Secretary-General's report and intend to review it carefully. Accordingly, in conjunction with this draft resolution, we are writing to the Under-Secretary-General for Management to underscore our interest in a thorough review of these issues.

We regret that this draft resolution has become a source of divisiveness rather than an opportunity to build bridges between parties and non-parties to the ICC. We remain sincere in our desire to develop a cooperative approach to promoting international criminal justice, and in our hope that ICC supporters will join us in such efforts.

The Acting President: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of position before action is taken on the draft resolution.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/62/L.13. May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/62/L.13?

Draft resolution A/62/L.13 was adopted (resolution 62/12).

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 76?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.

United Nations A/62/PV.58

General Assembly

Sixty-second session

Official Records

58th plenary meeting
Thursday, 29 November 2007, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim .... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 18

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/62/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/344)

Draft resolutions (A/62/L.18, A/62/L.19, A/62/L.20 and A/62/L.21)

Statement by the President

The President: On Monday, during our debate on revitalization at the 56th meeting, I stressed that it was first and foremost by squarely tackling the priority issues of the day that the General Assembly makes itself stronger, more effective and more relevant to the lives of the global public. We have the opportunity today to bolster the authority and international standing of the Assembly by addressing the question of Palestine in the light of recent developments.

Over the years, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has produced great losses and immense human suffering on both sides. It has had wider security implications for the region and peaceful relations between nations around the world. In his message on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, President Mahmoud Abbas made a solemn plea for the right of his people to enjoy the same sense of freedom and security that we all take for granted. He also reiterated that security and a just peace can only be achieved through mutual respect based and equality between both peoples. To achieve that goal, as noted by His Excellency Ambassador Natalegawa, President of the Security Council, the importance of restoring inter-Palestinian dialogue to rebuild national unity must be recognized.

I would like to praise Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas for their courage and willingness to engage in substantive results-orientated discussions at Annapolis, which have led to the Joint Understanding of the way forward. They both spoke in unison when they stated that the time has come for both peoples to put the past behind them. Both sides want peace and an end to terror.

I would like to commend President George Bush of the United States for bringing the parties together to launch a serious process of final status negotiations and for his personal commitment to support the conclusion of a peace treaty between Israel and Palestine before the end of 2008. The outcome of the Annapolis Conference offers a great opportunity for a permanent two-State solution. However, as the Secretary-General emphasized during his speech at Annapolis, the prerequisite for success requires a resolute commitment to boldly follow words with deeds.

The General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to support a two-State solution — Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders — as the most viable solution. The most encouraging aspect of the Annapolis meeting is that both sides have agreed to

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this approach and expressed their determination to end violence and usher in a new era of peace based on freedom, security, justice, dignity and mutual respect, principles that are the core purpose of the United Nations.

I would like to call on all Member States to make every effort to support this process. We must seize every opportunity for progress to fulfil the decades-long aspiration of the Palestinian people to live in freedom with dignity and for the right of the Israeli people to live in peace and security with their neighbours. The only way to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is through continuous dialogue, compromise and the resolute commitment to achieve a permanent solution. Both Israelis and Palestinians are going to have to be honest with their own people about the price of peace. This will require difficult choices and sacrifice on both sides, as part of a shared vision for a better future.

The stakes are high, but the alternatives are worse. The General Assembly has repeatedly expressed its concern over the continued deterioration of humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank. Without immediate progress, the ongoing situation will exacerbate the humanitarian, economic and security situation of the Palestinian people. This worsening security and economic situation is increasing the suffering endured by women and is hampering the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The General Assembly is committed to ensuring that the peaceful resolution of the conflict continues to be at the forefront of the international community's agenda. The Quartet has welcomed the commitment to launch peace negotiations leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State. The Quartet's representative, Tony Blair, has proposed concrete measures to strengthen Palestinian institutions and rehabilitate the economy. The Paris conference in December offers an important opportunity to fund these proposals and lay the foundation for a viable Palestinian State.

I urge the international community, therefore, to offer its full financial, technical and political support to make these reforms a reality and to help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

I also appeal to both Israeli and Palestinian officials to redouble their efforts to immediately implement their respective obligations under the Road Map and create the necessary conditions for long-term peace, based on mutual respect and recognition.

The General Assembly must continue to play a significant role in supporting this process. The Secretary-General has pledged the full support of the United Nations family for the renewed commitment to peace. If we really want to succeed — to achieve lasting peace — I encourage all parties to learn from the mistakes of the past and confront the causes of failure. True reconciliation requires not only an end to hostilities but also a change of attitude.

Some people believe that to make peace is to forget. As I mentioned this morning to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to reconcile is a fair compromise between remembering and forgetting.

The hard work must now begin in preparation for the next major meeting of the parties in Moscow on 12 December.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Badji (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, permit me, at the outset, to express my sincere appreciation to all representatives of Member States, observers, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, United Nations organs, funds and programmes, and members of civil society, who participated this morning in the solemn meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Their impressive presence at this ceremony is eloquent proof that the question of Palestine remains one of the major priorities of the United Nations and that the effective exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights continues to have particular importance.

Today marks the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II). By this important resolution the United Nations decided on the partition of Palestine into two independent States, one Arab and one Jewish, with an international regime for the City of Jerusalem. With this historic decision, the United Nations also took upon itself the permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until this question could be resolved in all its aspects, in accordance with strict respect for international legitimacy.

Since then, the involvement of various United Nations organs and entities has been growing, assuring the Palestinian people that it would not be abandoned by the international community until it could achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to this issue.

Our Committee is at the centre of our universal Organization's efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and is determined to pursue its important mission, entrusted to it by the General Assembly. The Committee's position is that the continuing illegal occupation of Palestinian territory remains the root cause of the conflict. It reaffirms the urgent need for a negotiated solution that will end the occupation, ensure the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and guarantee security for the State of Israel. This settlement must be based on international law, General Assembly resolution 194 (III), Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and other relevant United Nations resolutions, and the principles outlined in the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which constitute the unanimously accepted terms of reference for the settlement of the question of Palestine.

Our Committee is encouraged by the latest diplomatic efforts aimed at revitalizing the peace process. In this connection, we are hopeful, judging by the results, that the Annapolis conference will open the avenue to serious and constructive permanent status negotiations, in particular the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in security and in peace. It is important that the members of the Quartet, their regional partners and the main actors on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East participate fully in the initiative that has just been launched and help it to become a reality without delay.

The Committee is nevertheless very concerned about the unacceptably precarious situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The Palestinian people of the Gaza Strip have been the most affected, although all Palestinian people daily suffer hardship and humiliation as a direct consequence of the policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power.

The construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank and the presence of over 400,000 Jewish settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories are violations of international law — a fact that is often overlooked by major media organizations and is rarely noticed by the public. The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice with regard to the construction of the separation wall in the occupied West Bank and around East Jerusalem has not been implemented in the three years since its issuance by the Court. Moreover, in the past 40 years, the occupying Power has never met its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. The fundamental rights of the civilian Palestinian population are routinely violated. Palestinian civilians are the main victims of Israeli military operations in their towns and villages.

The Committee resolutely condemns any activities indiscriminately targeting civilians, either by the Israeli army or by Palestinian militias firing mortars and rockets at Israeli cities. Such attacks by both sides must end immediately, and those responsible must be brought to justice.

In addition, the Committee is alarmed by Israel's declaration of the Gaza Strip as hostile territory and by the introduction of repressive new sanctions, including the decision to reduce the supply of fuel and electricity. Such measures, which amount to collective punishment against the population of the Gaza Strip, contravene international humanitarian law.

The sealing off of the Gaza Strip, the continuation of Israeli incursions into Palestinian population centres and the humiliating system of checkpoints throughout the West Bank have heightened the frustration of Palestinian society. The Committee calls upon the Palestinian leadership, the leaders of all factions and all Palestinians to unite in support of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, as well as to resolve their political differences by peaceful means.

The Committee also calls for a return to the situation in the Gaza Strip prior to the events of June 2007 and for the preservation of the territorial unity and integrity of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

At this critical time, I call upon the Government of Israel to refrain from all actions that may destabilize the situation further, in particular the disproportionate use of military force and settlement activities, including the building of settlements on the pretext of so-called natural growth in existing settlements. Israel must also stop the illegal construction of the separation wall in the West Bank. As the occupying Power, Israel must work to significantly improve the humanitarian situation of Palestinians by lifting curfews, ease the restrictions imposed on the movement of persons and goods and resume paying the tax remittances to the Palestinian Authority that it has been withholding unjustifiably.

The Committee firmly believes that the United Nations should continue to maintain its permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine, until that question has been effectively resolved in all its aspects in strict accordance with international legitimacy. The Committee calls on the Security Council to act decisively to implement its own resolutions on the question of Palestine, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Committee also expects that the Security Council, the Organization's principal organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, will live up to its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. For its part, the Committee will continue to fulfil its General Assembly mandate aimed at helping the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

With regard to the four draft resolutions to be adopted under this agenda item, I would like to inform the Assembly that the sponsors have asked for enough time to be able to update the text of some of the draft resolutions so as to reflect political developments of recent days. I shall introduce the draft resolutions at a date to be announced later.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saviour Borg of Malta, in his capacity as the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the report contained in document A/62/35.

Mr. Borg (Malta): It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, which is contained in document A/62/35.

In the course of the past year, the Committee continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report I am about to introduce covers the developments relating to the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report through 5 October of this year.

The report's introduction outlines the Committee's objectives and its general perspective on events that took place in the course of the year. Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates of the Committee, including those of the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine and the relevant political developments monitored by the Committee during the year. That includes Israeli military incursions into the Gaza Strip and military operations in the West Bank, which resulted in a large number of deaths and injuries among Palestinian civilians; the restrictions on movement imposed by Israel in the West Bank, which affect every aspect of Palestinian life; the continued construction of the wall in disregard of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and illegal settlement activities; the internal situation in the Gaza Strip, which is having an adverse effect on the humanitarian situation and the provision of humanitarian aid; and the decision of the Israeli Security Cabinet in August to consider the Gaza Strip hostile territory and to apply additional sanctions to the territory.

The chapter also addresses other issues of concern, including the unacceptably high poverty rates among the Palestinian population, the numerous Palestinians remaining in Israeli jails, the decreasing water supply in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in carrying out its mandate. In this chapter, the Committee denounces the excessive and indiscriminate use of force, extrajudicial killings, the destruction of Palestinian homes, civilian infrastructure and agricultural lands and the attendant devastating effects on the Palestinian civilian population. At the same time, it strongly condemns all attacks against Israeli civilians.

The political developments reviewed in this chapter include the adoption of the Riyadh Declaration, endorsing the Arab Peace Initiative, at a meeting of Arab Foreign Ministers; the appointment of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair as Quartet Special

Representative; the reactivation of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee to oversee assistance management, financial support to the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian institutional reform; and international efforts, led by the President of the United States, to revitalize the political process.

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action in the General Assembly and the Security Council, as well as statements issued by the Bureau of the Committee. Section B contains a detailed account of the implementation of the work programmes of the Committee and the Division. It provides information regarding the continued dialogue and cooperation between the Committee and the European Union and its member States, as well as with other inter-governmental organizations. Sub-section 1 gives an account of the various international meetings and conferences organized over the course of the year. This section also deals with the Committee's cooperation with civil society, the research, monitoring and publications work of the Division, the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done during the year by the Department of Public Information pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/24 of 1 December 2006.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this chapter, the Committee emphasizes that the occupation, now in its forty-first year, is the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that the continued closures, the sealing off of the Gaza Strip, the Israeli incursions into Palestinian population centres and the humiliating system of checkpoints throughout the West Bank have had a most destructive effect on the lives of the Palestinian people and have rendered the Palestinian Authority nearly dysfunctional.

The Committee calls upon Israel to end its military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory and to put an end to any other measures that further undermine Palestinian institutions. It once again reminds Israel, the occupying Power, that it is bound by the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which obliges the parties to protect civilians during hostilities.

The Committee also strongly condemns the killing of innocent civilians by either side. It denounces rocket attacks on Israel and calls for a cessation of such activities by Palestinian armed groups.

The Committee strongly opposes the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and efforts to complete the construction of the wall. It reiterates its position of principle that those activities are contrary to international humanitarian law and numerous resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly adopted since 1967, as well as the provisions of the Road Map.

The Committee calls upon the Palestinian leadership, the leaders of all factions and all Palestinians to unite in support of President Abbas and the institutions of the Palestinian Authority and to resolve their political differences by peaceful means. The Committee calls for the restoration of the situation in the Gaza Strip to that which existed prior to the June events and for measures to be taken to preserve the territorial unity and integrity of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The Committee reiterates that only a negotiated solution can achieve the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine through the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, based on the 1967 borders. It also reiterates that a settlement should be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) in particular and on other relevant resolutions. The Committee emphasizes that it is incumbent on the Security Council to ensure the speedy and full implementation of its own resolutions. It calls on the Council to decide on effective steps to protect the civilian population, to end hostilities and to guide the parties, with the active involvement of the Quartet and regional actors, to a negotiated settlement.

The Committee notes the steps taken by the Board appointed by the Secretary-General and by its secretariat to commence the mandated work on the United Nations Register of Damage Caused by the Construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and requests all involved to expedite their efforts to render the Register operational. The Committee also encourages States members of the

European Union to continue to take a more proactive role in international efforts aimed at resolving the conflict.

The Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights in support of its mandate aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

The Committee stresses that its programme of international meetings and conferences contributes to focusing the attention of Governments, intergovernmental, non-governmental and civil society organizations and the general public on current issues and the need to promote a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The Committee commends civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and the mobilization of public opinion, and for their initiatives aimed at alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people.

The Committee also expresses its intention to continue to involve parliamentarians in its programme of international meetings and conferences. The Committee requests the Division to continue its substantive and secretariat support; its programme of research, monitoring and publications and other informational activities, such as the further expansion and development of UNISPAL, including the graphic enhancement of the "Question of Palestine" website; the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The Committee requests that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information be continued, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, the Committee reiterates its goal to make a contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The Committee also calls upon all States to join it in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role, to reconfirm its mandate and to extend its cooperation and support to the Committee.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in its deliberations on this very important issue.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yasir Abdrabou, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Abdrabou (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express our deep gratitude for your wise leadership and excellent stewardship as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. I also wish to express our thanks and appreciation to Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, who conducted the work of the sixty-first session in an excellent manner.

At the same time, it is my pleasure to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to its Chairman, His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, and to all the other officers and members of the Committee. I also wish to thank the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information for their tireless efforts and serious work to promote the Palestinian people's attainment of their inalienable rights and to mobilize international support for their cause.

I would like also to convey our gratitude to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his support for our cause and his efforts to serve the cause of peace.

Sixty years have passed since the 1947 adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which partitioned historic Palestine into two States. One of those two States, Israel, came into being, while the other, Palestine, has yet to see the light of day. Sixty long years have passed, and the question of Palestine remains unresolved and the Palestine remain stateless, deprived of their legitimate inalienable rights, such as the right to self-determination, independence and sovereignty and the right of more than 4 million Palestine refugees to return to their homes and properties.

For the past 40 years, the Palestinian people have continued to suffer under the aggressive and oppressive Israeli military occupation of their land; this is the longest occupation in modern history. They still endure the extensive and flagrant violation of all of their human rights and the confiscation of their lands, as well as humiliation and constant attacks on their dignity as a people.

In grave violation of international law, Israel, the occupying Power, continues its military aggression against the Palestinian people, including incursions and raids into Palestinian cities, towns, villages and camps as well as excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings, which, over the years, have caused thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of injuries, including among children and women. Israel continues to destroy Palestinian homes, property, infrastructure and agricultural lands. According to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, at least 18,000 Palestinian homes have been destroyed by Israel since 1967, leaving thousands of Palestinian families homeless and displaced.

Israel also continues to entrench its occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, through the construction and expansion of illegal colonial settlements. Currently, more than 450,000 Israeli settlers live in the more than 150 settlements constructed on Palestinian lands confiscated by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory. Early last month, Israel ordered the confiscation of at least 110 hectares of Palestinian land adjacent to four Palestinian villages in an area outside occupied East Jerusalem. The confiscation of this large tract of Palestinian land will facilitate the creation of a contiguous settlement bloc in that area, while simultaneously preventing Palestinian territorial contiguity between the area of occupied East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley and between the north and south of the West Bank.

Israel continues to construct the enormous apartheid annexation wall in the West Bank, including, in particular, in and around East Jerusalem. This has walled in Palestinian cities, towns and villages and transformed them into massive prisons and ghettos. On its official website, the Israeli Government has posted a new map of the apartheid wall that shows its vast length and the actual annexation of huge areas of Palestinian land.

The new route of the wall confirms previous reports that Prime Minister Olmert had ordered changes to the route of the wall in order to encompass more illegal Israeli settlements and more Palestinian land in the northern, central and southern West Bank. This constitutes a flagrant and deliberate violation of international law and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and is in continuation of the unilateral de facto policy pursued by successive Israeli Governments. The new route of the wall will actually increase the area of land that Israel is attempting to annex from 9 per cent to 12 per cent, half of which is in and around occupied East Jerusalem.

The illegal Israeli settlement campaign and the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, not only constitutes an obstacle to the achievement of a just and lasting peace between the two peoples, but also constitutes a hard blow to all true prospects for the establishment of a contiguous and viable Palestinian State.

As a result of all these measures and practices, the city of Jerusalem is suffering under the imposition of a suffocating siege and the attempts to surround it with the wall. That structure is isolating the city from the surrounding localities, including Bethlehem, restricting the access of both Muslim and Christian civilians to the city and preventing them from exercising their right to visit and worship at their holy places. Furthermore, the occupying Power continues to carry out many measures intended to Judaize the Holy City and to change its legal status, its historical and cultural character and its demographic composition.

Israel also continues to unlawfully detain and imprison approximately 11,000 Palestinians, including children, women and a number of officials and parliamentarians. Most of these prisoners and detainees are being held in inhumane conditions and being subjected to harsh physical and mental treatment, including acts of torture.

Moreover, Israel continues to impose all manner of collective punishment on the Palestinian people, including severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods within the occupied Palestinian territory and between it and the outside world, through prolonged closures and the establishment of more than 550 checkpoints and roadblocks. These measures fragment the contiguity and unity of the occupied Palestinian territory, transforming it into scattered and isolated Bantustans. At the same time, since it declared the Gaza Strip a "hostile entity" in September, Israel has continued to close all border crossings into and out of the Gaza Strip and to tighten its siege of that part of the occupied Palestinian territory. These illegal measures of collective punishment have caused the tragic humanitarian situation of Palestinian civilians to deteriorate even further.

In addition to constituting serious violations and grave breaches of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, these Israeli measures and practices are contradictory to the types of confidence-building measures that must be taken in order to continue and support the peace process and move it forward. When we speak of these illegal Israeli policies and practices, we are speaking of actual realities on the ground. As depressing, negative and frustrating as these facts may be — and as repetitive as it may sound to describe the pain that they have caused — they are the tragic realities being experienced by the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation. We must constantly draw the international community's attention to this situation until all such Israeli violations cease and until Israel complies with its legal obligations under international law and United Nations resolutions.

In recent years, the peace process has remained stagnant because of Israel's decision to prevent any progress from being made in the peace process and to undermine all efforts to resume dialogue and negotiations between the two sides on a final, just and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflict on the basis of international law, United Nations resolutions and the two-State solution.

The international Conference just held at Annapolis was successful because of the great efforts of the international community. That success was reflected in the large number of countries participating in the Conference and the exceptional efforts of the host country, the United States of America, the Quartet and Arab nations. Sixteen Arab States were in attendance, together with a number of other Islamic countries, members of the European Union, Japan and other Asian countries, African countries and a number of countries representing the Non-Aligned Movement. We hope that the Annapolis Conference will serve as an important basis for the donor conference to be held next month in Paris, as well as the political and economic activities that could result from it.

Yesterday, following the Annapolis Conference, negotiations between the two sides officially began on all final-status issues in order to find a just solution that will ensure respect for the rights of our people under occupation, who aspire to freedom and independence, and for those of our refugees, who seek to return to their homes and property. We reiterate once again that Israel must comply with all its obligations and requirements. All illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, must come to an immediate end. The dismantlement and removal of settlement outposts must begin immediately, and the construction of the apartheid annexation wall must immediately cease and the parts already built must be dismantled, as called for in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Checkpoints and roadblocks must be removed, and crossings must be opened. Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem that have been shut down must be allowed to reopen. Prisoners and detainees must be allowed to return to their homes and families.

There must be full respect for the Annapolis Joint Statement if a peace agreement is to be reached by the end of 2008 on the basis of the well-known terms of reference, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and the principle of land for peace. Moreover, when we emphasize the need to resolve the Palestine question in all its aspects, we are affirming that any efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace in the region must also address the question of the occupied Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territories.

At this critical stage, we must confront any attempts to undermine the exceptional opportunity that lies before us or to obstruct it by adopting narrow positions and agendas in order to maintain the status quo, which would have a deeply negative, detrimental and long-term impact on the situation throughout the region. Too much time has already passed. We must move beyond mere statements; more than good intentions is needed to achieve peace. The international community must take strong, principled and effective positions and decisive measures, redoubling its efforts to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, and to Israel's repeated and flagrant violations. The Palestinian people must enjoy freedom and exercise their inalienable right to self-determination in an independent State of their own with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and full realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, including the right of Palestinian refugees to return, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. International law and justice must be upheld so that peace can truly prevail.

An historic opportunity lies before us, and all those who want peace must seize this opportunity. There must be respect for international law. Political will and determination must push this process forward to overcome all of the obstacles and impediments that we currently face. Peace should be pursued through long-awaited and serious negotiations between the two sides on final status issues, including borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water and security. These are the core issues to which solutions must be found so as to enable the establishment of a Palestinian State and achievement of the peace that we are all striving for in the Middle East.

It is with bitterness and sadness that we must refer to the regrettable events that occurred in the Gaza Strip this past June. In that regard, we affirm the necessity of restoring the situation in the Gaza Strip to the status quo that existed prior to the events of June 2007 and of restoring the legitimacy of the Palestinian National Authority institutions under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and of allowing for a dialogue between all Palestinian factions to restore our national unity and to preserve the unity, contiguity and integrity of the Palestinian Territory, a situation to which all of the Palestinian people aspire. The Palestinian land is one land and the Palestinian people are one people and will never be divided.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the immense gratitude and appreciation of the Palestinian people for all of the support and solidarity extended to them over the years by the international community, including by the United Nations. The Palestinian people continue to hope for the continued support and assistance of the international community, which they need more than ever at this time. In that connection, we express our hope that all countries will vote in favour of all of the draft resolutions submitted under the agenda items on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East and all other draft resolutions relevant to Palestine that will come before the Assembly.

We are firmly convinced that all free and peace-loving nations of the world stand for justice and fairness and support the question of Palestine because it is a just and noble cause and because these nations too wish to see an end the suffering and pain of our people through realization of their rights, freedom and an independent State of Palestine, and to see an end to decades of occupation, conflict and cycles of violence in the Middle East region. The Palestinian people, wish to witness and celebrate the flourishing of peace, security, stability, justice and prosperity for all the peoples of the region. Let us work together without delay to make the vision and goal of peace and justice a reality and a fact of life.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Today we are commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a date on which the international community reaffirms its support of this heroic people's efforts to exercise its inalienable right to self-determination and to achieve independence and freedom. Today, we recall that the Palestinian people have for nearly 60 years suffered from alienation, statelessness, dispossession and dispersal in exile, awaiting fulfilment of their right to return to their lands. They have suffered for more than 40 years under a brutal foreign occupation and have been denied their inalienable human rights. On this occasion we must pledge to redouble our efforts to bring an end to that injustice by exerting the necessary efforts to resolve the question of Palestine in all its aspects and to achieve the peace and justice that are long overdue.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its grave concern over the constant deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly as a result of the excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population and its many other illegal policies and practices.

NAM condemns the prolonged Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 and expresses grave concern over the distressing developments in the recent period. For four decades, Israel has been unrelentingly violating international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, in its actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. During that time, the occupying Power has been committing grave human rights violations against the Palestinian people, including war crimes.

Moreover, for four decades Israel has carried out deliberate and unlawful policies and practices aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and nature of the Palestinian land and the de facto annexation of that land, particularly via measures such as the confiscation of large areas of Palestinian land, implementation of its illegal colonial settlement policy and, since 2003, the illegal construction of a wall in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem. The occupying Power continues to pursue those illegal policies and measures to this day in total disrespect for and in contravention of international law, including in particular the Geneva Convention, United Nations resolutions and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004.

In addition, Israel continues to impose a humiliating and discriminatory network of hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, seriously fragmenting and undermining the contiguity and integrity of the territory and completely isolating East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, to impose closures, to seal off the Gaza Strip, to arrest and detain thousands of Palestinian civilians and to carry out forceful military raids and incursions into Palestinian population centres, causing extensive loss of life and injury to Palestinian civilians, including children, and the deliberate and widespread destruction of property and land.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns all such illegal actions by Israel, the occupying Power, and calls for their immediate cessation. Furthermore, NAM believes that these illegal Israeli actions, including ongoing military attacks, have seriously undermined the functioning of the Palestinian Authority and have undoubtedly contributed to the growing polarization of the Palestinian society. NAM expresses hope for the speedy restoration of Palestinian national unity, which is important for the achievement of the legitimate national aspirations and goals of the Palestinian people.

NAM underscores the severity of the situation being faced by the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip resulting from the suffocating siege and closure of all of its crossings by Israel, the occupying Power. Such unlawful collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population by Israel has caused the further deterioration of socio-economic conditions, leading to the widespread incidence of poverty and hunger, and has caused the humanitarian situation to continue to deteriorate to deeply disturbing levels. Israel, the occupying Power, must respect its obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and cease all such illegal and inhumane practices against the Palestinian people in Gaza.

In a dangerous development of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, Israel's Security Cabinet decided to declare the occupied Gaza Strip as a hostile territory, declaring its intention to cut off power and fuel supplies to the already isolated and imprisoned Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip. That cruel decision by Israel amounts to a violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, and the collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip. It is totally unjustifiable under any pretext and should be condemned. Israel, the occupying Power, should comply with its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to the entire occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In that connection, it must be emphasized that the Gaza Strip clearly remains a part of the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Non-Aligned Movement calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to halt its grave violations of international law and to scrupulously abide by international humanitarian law, by which it is bound as an occupying Power.

In that regard, the Movement calls for the opening of all crossings to allow for the movement of persons and goods, access to supplies and movement of humanitarian personnel, including those of the United Nations agencies on the ground. Moreover, the Non-Aligned Movement calls for Israel to fulfil its responsibility to repair all damage caused to the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip. Today, we also call upon all States and the international community as a whole to urgently provide economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people during this critical period in order to alleviate the current financial and humanitarian crisis they continue to face.

The countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement, once again call upon the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and take the necessary actions to fulfil its own resolutions and the necessary steps to compel Israel to respect international law and end its occupation and the illegitimate and illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It is unacceptable that the Security Council, which holds the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, is still failing to fulfil its permanent responsibility regarding the Palestinian question, while it has not been solved in all its aspects on the basis of international law.

The unilateral measures applied by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are a serious threat to the prospects for peace and the possibility of achieving a negotiated agreement, based on the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

The Non-Aligned Movement sincerely hopes that the international meeting held this week in Annapolis will effectively contribute to the efforts by the international community to re-launch the Middle East peace process with the aim of addressing all the fundamental issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. The peaceful resolution of both those conflicts is of the highest importance to all the members of Non-Aligned Movement and of critical importance to international peace and security.

In that regard, the Movement reaffirms the importance and central role of international law, United Nations resolutions, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

The Non-Aligned Movement acknowledges the common understanding reached by the Israeli and Palestinian sides at the Annapolis meeting and stresses the urgency of resuming direct, substantive and accelerated negotiations between the parties that will address all territorial final status issues and will ultimately put an end to the occupation of all Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 that remain occupied, namely the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan. Such negotiations should lead to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within which the Palestinian people can exercise their inalienable right to self-determination as a free people and enjoy all of their fundamental human rights, and to the achievement of a just solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III) and international law.

The Non-Aligned Movement will continue to support the Palestinian people and its leadership in order to bring an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

On this occasion, we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): I have the honour to speak in this important debate on behalf of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). At the outset, I wish to express our appreciation to Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his outstanding leadership of the Committee.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference, in its various declarations, communiqués and resolutions, has spelled out and reaffirmed its positions on the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the basis and principles for achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Most recently, the 34th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, held in Islamabad in May, and the Annual Coordination Meeting of the OIC Foreign Ministers, held in New York in September, reiterated those positions in support of a comprehensive peace on all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The OIC calls for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as agreed principles. They require Israel's complete withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and all other occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan; the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and sovereignty in their independent and viable State of Palestine, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital; and a just resolution to the plight of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

The unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular the core issue of Palestine, constitutes a grave and persistent threat to international peace and security, especially after 40 years of foreign occupation. This cauldron of conflict has, over the decades, resulted in widespread death and destruction, caused misery, aroused anger and frustration and bred mistrust and antagonism between Israel and the Arab and Islamic world.

The Islamic world has a natural and strong emotional attachment to the issue of Palestine and a deep commitment to its just and peaceful settlement. The centrality of the cause of Al-Quds Al-Sharif for the entire Islamic ummah should be clear to all. Hopes for peace have been dashed repeatedly by Israel's prolongation of its illegal occupation of Arab territories and its propensity to resort to the threat and use of force. The Muslim world has been disappointed in particular by the inability, and at times partiality and unwillingness, on the part of the great Powers to promote just and durable solutions to the several crises in the Middle East. International law has been allowed to be violated with impunity. The resolutions of the Security Council and other United Nations bodies, including the Assembly, remain unimplemented. Apathy, discrimination and double standards have themselves become a major underlying cause of the mistrust and misunderstanding between the Islamic and the Western worlds.

This is an unfortunate and unnecessary situation. It is clear that the tragedy and oppression of the Palestinian people and the suffering, humiliation and human rights violations have touched the conscience of common people all over the world. The just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and freedom from foreign occupation enjoys the strong support and solidarity of the entire international community. It goes beyond religious group or regional affiliations.

This debate of the General Assembly, which coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and takes place 60 years after the adoption of resolution 181 (II) and the Palestinian *Nakba*, that is, the great catastrophe, has demonstrated the wide support that exists for the Palestinian cause.

The central conclusions emanating from the discussions in the Assembly and its committees are clear. The root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories. An end to that occupation of all Arab territories is therefore a necessary prerequisite for peace. The world can no longer afford to allow the multiple conflicts in the Middle East to fester. There is a unanimous desire for an early, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. A just and final settlement of the core dispute of Palestine is imperative in order to achieve such a comprehensive Middle East peace. There is wide consensus it must be a pacific settlement, reached through dialogue and negotiations.

While the craving for peace is intensifying, the futility of the use of force to achieve durable solutions has also become evident. It is now incumbent on the international community to translate that desire for a negotiated settlement into reality. We welcome all recent regional and international efforts, including the revival of the Arab Peace Initiative and the Conference on the Middle East hosted by the United States in Annapolis on 27 November. We hope the Annapolis meeting will be the beginning of the end of the tragedy of Palestine and a dawn of peace in the Holy Land. The Islamic countries participated in the Annapolis Conference in response to the invitation from the United States to signal their commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine and in the Middle East.

We welcome the commitment to the establishment of the Palestinian State and the agreement to start final status negotiations to resolve all core issues, including borders, refugees, settlements and Jerusalem. In order to be fair, those issues must be resolved on the basis of previous agreements, especially the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid Peace Conference terms of reference, the Quartet's Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. That will also entail Israeli withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We hope a peace treaty will be finalized before the end of 2008 and will then be implemented quickly and earnestly. Delay and obstruction could exacerbate rather than enhance the prospect for peace.

Last week marked the fortieth anniversary of adoption of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). The provisions and principles for a just and lasting settlement set out in that resolution remain fundamental and relevant today: the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war; the withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the 1967 conflict; and a just settlement of the refugee problem. We also believe that a peace agreement concluded through the negotiations launched in Annapolis will need to be supplemented by appropriate mechanisms and guarantees for their fair and full implementation by all sides. The Council and the General Assembly must play their rightful roles in that regard.

Meanwhile, it is important to build an environment of trust and confidence to support the peace process. We remain deeply concerned over the continuing plight of the Palestinian people and their continuing humiliation and collective punishment under Israeli occupation. The Palestinian people continue to be the victims of violence and military aggression, grave human rights violations and socio-economic deprivation and strangulation, which affect all aspects of their lives. The dire situation in the occupied territories is depicted in detail in various United Nations and other reports. The international community must ensure full compliance by Israel of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to all the occupied territories. Israel must also end policies and actions that seek to change the realities on ground and thus prejudice a final settlement, including the integrity and viability of a future Palestinian state.

There are certain immediate requirements to create the conditions necessary for the success of negotiations for peace in the Middle East. They include, first, bringing about a rapid and tangible improvement of the situation on the ground in the occupied territories; ending the oppression and suffering of the Palestinian people; a cessation of military campaigns by Israel; a release of political prisoners; a halt to the construction of the illegal separation wall; a freeze on settlement activities; the dismantling of unauthorized settler outposts; the removal of all kinds of blockades and restrictions; an end to the siege of Gaza and its illegal declaration by Israel as an enemy entity; and an end to violence.

Secondly, enhanced humanitarian, economic and social support must be provided to the Palestinians from the international community, including an immediate restoration and unimpeded provision of all essential goods and services to the Palestinian people in all the occupied territories.

Thirdly, support must be provided to the Palestinian Authority to enable it to build State institutions, including its security apparatus. We look forward, in that context, to a successful donors conference in Paris to respond to the requirements of the Palestinian people.

Obviously, together with the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, efforts must continue to revive Palestinian unity. Durable peace is impossible with a divided people. An essential step to reaching reconciliation is for the situation that exists on the ground in Gaza to return to that which existed prior to the events of June 2007.

The discussions in Annapolis also recognized the crucial importance of addressing all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks, in order to achieve comprehensive peace. We hope to see progress on those parallel tracks to reach a just and durable settlement. Israel must withdraw completely from Lebanese land and the occupied Syrian Golan and comply fully with Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

Today, we are at yet another crucial juncture in the search for a lasting peace in the Middle East. As the leaders have declared in Annapolis, the time is ripe for concluding peace. But time is not unlimited. The consequences of failure would be grave: a rise of extremism and violence that could engulf the entire Middle East.

An early comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the core issue of Palestine, must be our collective strategic objective. All Member States must pledge complete commitment to that objective and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. Indeed, that would have a positive impact on regional and international peace and security and help stabilize other simmering situations in the region. While remaining fully committed to the just cause of the Palestinian people, OIC will play its rightful role in the collective endeavour to establish lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Outlule (Botswana), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's support for the content of the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The Assembly meets today to consider the question of Palestine amid a cautious optimism regarding the efforts that were made to move the peace process forward on the Palestinian-Israeli track, aiming at the establishment of a viable Palestinian State on the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip, including occupied East Jerusalem, before the end of 2008. Today's meeting comes one day after the international Annapolis Conference was held to re-launch Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, to reach a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, amid growing international efforts to achieve similar progress on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, and to bring about a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict within the same time frame.

If the Annapolis Conference was only a first step on the way to reviving the peace process and launching the final status negotiations, the success of such efforts will require strong political will and sincere and continuous efforts from Israel to reach a final agreement on the six final status core issues, including Jerusalem and the return of the refugees, without procrastination or attempts to win time while imposing a de facto situation. That requires setting a specific timetable for implementing commitments, monitored by an active international follow-up mechanism, in the framework of the implementation of the Road Map under the auspices of the international Quartet, in order to ensure the progress of negotiations in the right direction and within a definite time frame.

In that context, the Assembly's consideration of the question of Palestine today has special importance, since it provides the support of the most democratic and representative organ of the United Nations for the rights of the people of Palestine and the legitimate endeavour to realize a peaceful and just settlement of that question through the ending of the occupation, the establishment of the independent State of Palestine and the provision to Palestinian civilians of protection from the oppression of the occupation. That requires enhancement of the Assembly's role in addressing the question of Palestine and realizing the legitimate hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people, alongside intensification of international efforts to reach the results aspired to on all levels by establishing the Palestinian State by the end of 2008.

Similarly, enhancing the Assembly's ability to deepen international respect for human rights in a framework free from selectivity, politicization and double standards requires us to redouble our efforts to ensure respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people until the establishment of their own independent State, through effective measures and procedures that guarantee an end to the systematic violations of international law and international humanitarian law by the occupying Power and its repeated aggressions against Palestinian civilians. That will break the international silence prevailing on the subject of extrajudicial killings, continuous closure of crossing points and blockades of roads, collective punishment, threats to cut off water and electricity supplies and all means of survival in the Gaza Strip, expansion of settlements, confiscation of land and construction of the separation wall in the occupied West Bank in breach of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and resolution ES-10/17 of the Tenth Emergency Special Session of the Assembly. Israel rejects the implementation of that resolution, thus ignoring the international community's will and the rules of international legitimacy.

Egypt believes that the success of the new negotiation track between the Palestinian and the Israeli parties after the Annapolis Conference requires the immediate implementation of a number of confidence-building measures and procedures under the supervision of the international community, in order to reach a final and permanent solution to the question of Palestine according to the relevant international terms of reference. Those are, primarily, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), Assembly resolution 194 (III), the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, the Road Map, the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

In that context, we renew our call to Israel to cease its practices of collective punishment in the West Bank and Gaza and to return to the borders of 28 September 2000 as a confidence-building initiative. We also call upon the Quartet to fulfil its responsibility more effectively by monitoring both parties' level of implementation of their commitments to the peace process. We look forward to an active role being undertaken by the United Nations, as a member of the Quartet, in ensuring the establishment of an independent Palestinian State before the end of 2008.

In addition to the efforts of the international community and the concerned regional parties, both the Israeli and Palestinian sides have the responsibility to support steps aimed at restoring confidence, through the parallel implementation of the first phase of the Road Map; an end to the settlement policy; the release of the Palestinian prisoners and officials detained in Israeli prisons; the re-opening of Palestinian Authority institutions in East Jerusalem; an end to the firing of rockets by both sides, against Palestinian civilians on the one hand and against civilian Israeli areas on the other; and the release of the abducted Israeli soldier.

We welcome in that context the political will expressed by President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert towards supporting efforts to reach a settlement. We look forward to the launching of the final status negotiations that will represent a starting point for breaking the cycle of violence and counter-violence and changing the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians on the ground, in order to restore their trust in the peace process and to allow them to feel that there is a positive and peaceful outcome to build upon.

In addition to supporting endeavours to move the peace process forward and participate effectively in the launching of the final status negotiations, Egypt looks forward to the donors conference to be held in Paris in order to provide the necessary economic support for the Palestinian people. Egypt has spared no effort to support all endeavours to achieve the unity of the Palestinian people and to maintain the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory in the West Bank and Gaza as one politically integrated unit of people. We hope that when we consider this item at the next session, an agreement will have been achieved regarding the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Happy birthday, Mr. President. I know those words evoke a different voice and a different president, but, with all seriousness, happy birthday. On this day, 60 years ago, the Jewish State was born, out of the historic 1947 session of the General Assembly, at which two extraordinary gifts were given to humanity: the gift of a modern State for the Jewish people and the gift of Israel to the world.

I have just come from a commemorative ceremony at Lake Success, where the United Nations met 60 years ago. You see, throughout history, nations traditionally have been created through war and conquest. Israel, however, was created by United Nations decree and by the nations of the world. To be there at Lake Success today, just a few hours ago, representing my Government and my people, was indeed a joyous occasion. I wish you all a happy birthday.

Late last night, I returned from Annapolis. It was a memorable occasion, with representatives from over 40 nations — chief among them moderate States of the Arab and Muslim world — committed to supporting the bilateral process between Israel and the Palestinians and committed to supporting moderation and marginalizing extremism. The air in Annapolis was filled with the hope that, by working together, we can realize a peaceful and better tomorrow. I have no doubt that that sense of optimism was felt by all those in attendance.

Yet, back here in New York, standing before this Assembly, in a place so distant from Annapolis in body, mind and soul, I cannot help but wonder whether today's debate will contribute to the spirit, promise and hope of Annapolis. After all, this Assembly Hall is also the birthplace of the 21 annual resolutions defaming Israel with a litany of predetermined, impractical and completely biased conclusions that have only given the Palestinians a fictitious sense of reality and a discourse of rights without responsibilities, both of which render the United Nations completely incapable of playing a meaningful role in addressing the conflict.

Today, 29 November, is perhaps the greatest example of how this Assembly continues to stifle hope and faith for peace in our region. According to the calendar of the United Nations, today is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which by definition precludes Israel.

Let me be clear: Palestinian self-determination is a cause Israel wholeheartedly supports. Indeed, at the Annapolis meeting, just two days ago, my Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Olmert, said:

> "We will find the right way, as part of an international effort in which we will participate, to assist these Palestinians in finding a proper framework for their future, in the Palestinian state

which will be established in the territories agreed upon between us".

Over the years, however, the proceedings held in this Hall and at United Nations centres around the world have corrupted the cause of Palestinian self—determination and transformed it into a denigration and defamation of the Jewish State.

I have been listening carefully to some of the statements delivered this afternoon, and I know many of them will follow. They all focused on Israel. The narrative is the same: it is unjust, draining, grossly erroneous, misleading andm I daresay, viciously boring. It is sadly, yet again, a sense of déja-vu all over again. The penchant for blaming Israel for the repeated Palestinian failures is so widespread and contagious that the absurdity of it goes completely unnoticed. Today reminds us why that is so: the Palestinian addiction to the culture of victimhood is fed by this world body and specifically many of its Member States, as we have just witnessed. Day after day, week after week, month after month and indeed year after year, they use this international forum for their rhetorical theatrics. Broadway might have been on strike until today, but the theatre on the East River is always open for business. It is time to close the gap between the reality on the ground and the rhetoric in this Hall now, forever and once and for all.

For us — for Jews and for Israelis — today is not a bitter day at all. We are not downtrodden or haunted by vanquished dreams. Today is a day of great victory and success — victory over oppression and tyranny and success over the painful tragedies and suffering of Jewish history. Today, we celebrate the resilience of the Jewish people and our eternal bond to the land of Israel, where after so many years of yearning and longing in exile, we merited the return to our homeland.

The joy felt on 29 November 1947, exactly 60 years ago is recounted by Amos Oz, one of Israel's most celebrated writers and a candidate for the Nobel Prize in literature:

> "There was dancing and weeping .... Bottles of fruit drink, beer and wine passed from hand to hand and mouth to mouth, strangers hugged each other in streets and kissed each other with tears .... frenzied revelers ... waved the flag of the state that had not been established yet, but tonight, over there in Lake Success, it had been decided that it had the right to be established".

Travel to any city in Israel and you will no doubt find a street named for this very day, Kaftet be-November, 29 November, a testament to its importance and significance to our people. In fact, I live in Tel Aviv just yards from a street named after 29 November, and my eldest grandson, Ron, was born on this very date, nine years ago. It is on his behalf and on behalf of all the children of Israel and all the children of the region that I stand before you here today.

Think of the past 60 years rand consider Israel's many contributions to the world in the fields of science and technology, medicine, art and culture. It is a country that has discovered ways to stop deserts from advancing; a country that has engineered critical advancements in medicine, cures for illnesses and limbs for the disabled; and a country that has endowed the world with rich treasures of art and culture, through its Nobel Laureates, poets, artists and writers.

Think about where the world would be today without the State of Israel — and I know some in this Hall perversely dream about such a question. But Israel is here to stay, to flourish and to continue to contribute to the advancement of man, progress and human civilization. It is then the greatest insult to us, to history and to this Assembly that while Israel celebrates, others at the United Nations mourn.

Some Member States will note my delegation's absence from past 29 November proceedings. We stopped addressing this Assembly because some Member States hijacked and abused the forum for their own political interests and turned it into yet another venue to demonize Israel. We cannot allow that to happen any longer. Today is our day. It is high time for Israel and for all those committed to peace in our region to reclaim this day for what it truly means: the peaceful coexistence of two independent States in the region, a Jewish State and a Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security, each fulfilling the national aspirations of its respective people.

In that regard, it is all the more bewildering that, of late, the Jewish character of the State of Israel has been called into question. Last week, as Israelis and Palestinians set out for Annapolis, a veteran Palestinian negotiator said the Palestinians will never acknowledge Israel's Jewish identity.

The resolution that gives 29 November significance, resolution 181 (II), speaks of the creation of the "Jewish State" no less than 25 times. Even before that, the notion of a Jewish State in the land of Israel was cemented in the 1922 League of Nations British Mandate on Palestine, which put into effect the Balfour Declaration of 1917 to establish a national home for the Jewish people.

The Arab refusal to recognize the existence of our Jewish State has been at the core of the Palestinians' inability to achieve a State of their own. When the Jews accepted the United Nations partition plan, the Arabs made a fateful — and indeed fatal — choice to reject it and invade the newly born Jewish State, rather than coexist with it.

Had the Arabs accepted the decision of the United Nations, there would have been two States, one Jewish and one Arab, all this time, for the past 60 years. Had the Arabs not rejected the decision, my Palestinian colleague who spoke earlier would have represented a Member State, not just an observer entity.

The wrong choices did not end in 1947. We saw them again in 1967, 1973, 2000 and 2005, when Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip only to have the Palestinians bring the Hamas terrorists to power. The wrong choices of the Palestinians continue until this very day, when, on average, Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip fire rockets at Israel every three hours.

For their brutal violence, arrogance and intransigence, Israel has paid an enormous price, with the lives of our people: the Israeli victims of Palestinian terrorism, men, women and children, young and old, doctors and lawyers, artists and scientists, all who would have contributed so greatly to life in Israel and to the betterment of the entire world.

The terrorism we still see today stems from an innate refusal to recognize Israel, a refusal to recognize the Jewish State and a refusal to recognize the value of our lives. So long as there is a denial of the existential issues, I fear there can never be an agreement on the territorial ones.

Annapolis — I hope and believe — represents a new wind of change. Moderate Arab and Muslim States today recognize that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the cause of instability in our region and that the conflict can and will end. They also recognize that the real dangers come directly from Islamic extremism and its champion, Iran, who sponsors terrorism around the globe, tries to attain nuclear weapons and denies the Holocaust while preparing for the next one, relentlessly defying the will of the international community.

The coalition for peace that the world saw assembled in Annapolis just two days ago will support the process between Israel and the Palestinians. But it is also a coalition that will hopefully counter and confront the extremists in Tehran.

I hope that the winds of Annapolis will blow to the north, to this very Hall. For there could be no better time for the nations of the world — and in particular the moderate Arab and Muslim States in this Hall today — to show their commitment to the Israeli-Palestinian process. There could be no better place than here at the United Nations — where for decades Israel has been discriminated against and singled out, contrary to the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations — for Members States to tell Israel and the Palestinians that they support our dialogue.

Allow me to take you back once more to 60 years ago, to 2 October 1947, when David Ben-Gurion, founding father and first Prime Minister of the State of Israel, two months prior to the General Assembly's historic vote, said in Jerusalem:

> "We will not surrender our right to free Aliyah, to rebuild our shattered homeland, to claim statehood. If we are attacked, we will fight back. But we will do everything in our power to maintain peace, and establish cooperation gainful to both. It is now, here and now, from Jerusalem itself, that a call must go out to the Arab nations to join forces with Jewry and the destined Jewish State and work shoulder to shoulder for the common good, for the peace and progress of sovereign equals".

Sixty years later — today, here — Israel's message to the Arab nations and the Palestinians has not changed: shoulder to shoulder for the common good, now, more than ever, with the winds of change blowing strong from Annapolis, to New York, to the Middle East, to all corners of the earth.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the members of the Committee for the efforts that they are all deploying to implement the mandate of the Committee. The Committee's mandate is to achieve the objectives for which it was established in 1975 by Assembly resolution 3376 (XXX) and the programme of action that seeks to enable the Palestinian people to exercise the rights that were recognized by the Assembly in resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 1974, chief among them being their right to self-determination.

My delegation supports the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

We also express our gratitude to the Committee for its valuable report, contained in document A/62/35, in which it focuses on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the deterioration it has witnessed in the enjoyment of human rights and basic freedoms as a result of the Israeli military incursions into the Gaza Strip, the military operations in the West Bank and their attendant deaths and injuries among Palestinian civilians. That caused the Committee to express its deep concern with regard to the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The occupying Power, as the Committee mentions in paragraph 17 of its report, has, ever since its occupation of the Arab territories 40 years ago, sought to change the Palestinian territory by adopting illegal policies and practices.

These include the internationally condemned construction of settlements, the construction of the separation wall, paralysis in the work of the Palestinian Authority as a result of the closures, the isolation of the Gaza Strip, the humiliating system of checkpoints, and the Israeli military operations being carried out against the Palestinian people. These practices were condemned by foreign ministers of the Group of 77 and China in their ministerial declaration of 27 September 2007. They saw those illegal Israeli practices, including the illegal construction of settlements, the wall and the bypass roads, as the root cause of the deterioration of the social and economic conditions of the Palestinian people over the past year.

There is no doubt that the occupying Power's continued construction of the separation wall is in total disregard of the July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which affirmed the applicability to the occupied Palestinian territories of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and of all relevant international agreements and the human rights Conventants of 1966.

A recent report of the Economic and Social Council states that the construction of the wall has a grave humanitarian impact on the Palestinian communities in the West Bank. The wall will be 703 kilometres long, having grown by 33 kilometres since the Israeli Cabinet agreed to a second change in re-routing the wall. It will isolate thousands of Palestinians from their agricultural lands. As stated by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the wall is being constructed in a manner that will isolate more fertile Arab lands and natural resources.

Although the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, through resolution ES-10/17 of 2006, established the United Nations Register of Damage Caused by the Construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and although the Secretary-General appointed, on 10 May 2007, three international experts to the Board of the Register, Israel's refusal to allow the establishment of an office for the Register in the occupied Palestinian territories has denied the Palestinians the chance to register their claims of damage, which leads to fears that the data that has been compiled may be lost.

In addition to the fact that the separation wall is in flagrant violation of international law, the establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, also breaches international law. That was the conclusion of the International Court of Justice in paragraph 120 of its Advisory Opinion.

The final communiqué of the annual coordination meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, held in New York on 2 October 2007, reiterated its grave condemnation of Israel for its continuing intensive campaign of setteler colonialism and for continuing the continuation of the construction of the separation wall.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has emphasized that the Israeli occupation is the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is in consonance with what we have consistently repeated with regards to the occupation, which in itself constitutes a violation of human rights. Perhaps what attracts attention is that Israel is bent on entrenching its occupation through building and expanding its settlements. That caused the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, John Dugard, in his report to the Human Rights Council in March 2007, to propose seeking a new opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the long-term occupation.

The sixty-second session of the Assembly is being held after 40 years of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories, which began in 1967. The occupation still pursues the worst policies of inhuman treatment against the Palestinians. The tragedies, setbacks and suffering of the Palestinian people are the result of the policy of isolation, displacement, destruction of houses and siege. Those policies constitute clear and undeniable violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of the human rights of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories. That resulted in the humanitarian crisis that the Palestinians are still enduring. The situation has been deteriorating since September 2000: there has been an increase in poverty and unemployment; the occupying forces have paralysed the infrastructure and reduced water and electricity supplies; and there has been a decrease in food supplies and a shortage of medicine, in the Gaza Strip in particular. This has aggravated the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and could lead to deepened hatred and increased violence and extremism.

In that context, the only solution must be a peaceful political solution, strongly linked to reaching a just settlement of the conflict in conformity with the principle of international legitimacy and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Arab countries have continuously expressed their concern to put an end to this conflict in a peaceful manner that would bring about regional peace and security. They have been deploying all possible efforts to achieve this objective in order to reach a comprehensive, peaceful and just settlement by establishing two States, living side-by-side within safe and recognized borders.

Bahrain therefore welcomed the call of the President of the United States, George Bush, to convene an international conference on peace in the Middle East, which concluded its work yesterday in Annapolis. It is our hope that that meeting will launch a new phase, putting an end to the core problems of the Israeli-Arab conflict. A commitment by all parties to put an end to the conflict will lead to the establishment of real and just peace in the region and a just and lasting settlement, putting an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967. Peace is a strategic option, and there is now an opportunity for peace. We must not miss this opportunity. This peace requires the implementation of United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the implementation of the Road Map, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative and the establishment of a Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Mansour (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): This meeting in the General Assembly, held on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is special and symbolically very important. It reminds us again of our responsibility vis-à-vis the Palestinian people, of the urgent need to put an end to the daily suffering of the Palistinians and of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian occupied territories.

Furthermore, it comes in the midst of intensified Arab and world action aimed at reviving the peace process and at bringing to an end the crisis in the Middle East.

Given the exacerbation of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, the continuation of difficulties that the Palestinian people are encountering and the restrictions limiting their freedom, which prevents them from exercising their basic rights and deprives them of access to humanitarian assistance — Tunisia would like to reiterate its deep concern vis-à-vis this tragic situation. We call for the lifting of the blockade against the Palestinian people, so as to stop further deterioration of the conditions that they live under in their constant suffering owing to the oppressive practices of the occupying Power.

Tunisia considers the Palestinian issue primary and pivotal and gives it strong and principled support. We have thus called from this forum and other international bodies, and at various international and regional meetings, for immediate and effective international action to guarantee the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and enable them to have an independent State on their national soil.

Tunisia appreciates the ongoing efforts on the part of the international community on this issue, both in the General Assembly in other international bodies, in particular the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. We support all these efforts and call for their continuation and for serious endeavors aimed at ending the crisis in the region.

In this context, allow me to quote from a statement made by the President of Tunisia, Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. He said that Tunisia calls upon the international community and all the influential actors and the Quartet to continue their efforts to let the peace process succeed in line with relevant United Nations resolutions and Arab and international terms of reference, so that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace can be established for the benefit of the people of the region. President Ben Ali, speaking about the need to enable the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate rights, also said in his statement that Tunisia was hopeful that all efforts would be pooled in order to reactivate the peace process relaunched in Annapolis so that peace and stability can be achieved in the region. Establishing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in a region that has been suffering from this conflict for too many years means that all the influential parties, in particular the United Nations, should shoulder their responsibility by imposing respect for United Nations resolutions in order to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate rights to freedom, dignity, peace and stability within an independent State on their national soil. Moreover, achieving peace in the region, requires finding a final solution for all the various issues that are still pending, including recovery of occupied Syrian Golan and occupied Lebanese territory.

Tunisia, which has always supported the struggle of the Palestinian people in its just cause, reiterates here its strong solidarity with the Palestinians and their right to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent State on their soil. By the same token and as a peace-loving country keen on respecting international legitimacy, Tunisia hopes that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace can be established in a region that has suffered a long-lasting conflict that deprived it of living in security and stability.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Sir, allow me to align myself with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the statement made by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Also, on behalf of my country, I would like to express my profound thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to its Chairman, Ambassador Paul Badji, to the Division for Palestinian Rights in the Secretariat, and to the United Nations Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information for the efforts they have made and continue to make in order to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy on the question of Palestine, which call for putting an end to the continuous suffering of this people that has been going on for more than 60 years.

The General Assembly is meeting today, as champions of freedom, justice and truth have gathered on this day every year to reaffirm their support for the Palestinian people in their struggle against the Israeli occupation and for their right to self-determination and to establish their independent State on their own territory and to obtain the restoration of their, legitimate rights in full, including the refugees' right to return for refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

Many efforts have been undertaken by the United Nations, and hundreds of resolutions have been adopted calling upon Israel to end its occupation of Arab land. Israel, regrettably, continues to refuse to comply with the will of the international community. The Palestinian people are still under the yoke of the Israeli occupation and still suffer under Israel's policy of killing and destruction.

In the light of this dual problem, on the one hand, the fact that Israel does not comply with the international will, and, on the other hand, the continuation of the suffering of the Palestinian people, the United Nations has the urgent and immediate responsibility to shoulder its responsibilities vis-à-vis the question of Palestine, by finding a just solution to this question, since this Organization is the same one that adopted resolution 181 (II) of 1947. Therefore, all United Nations Member States bear responsibility for non-implementation of that resolution until now.

Israel, the inception of which was legitimized through a resolution adopted by the United Nations, has no respect for international legitimacy or for moral or humanitarian principles. A few days ago, the representative of Israel arrogantly described this international Organization as an anti-Semitic organization.

We would like to recall that resolution 273 (III), which was adopted on 11 May 1949, established the conditions for Israel's admission as a Member of the United Nations, namely, that it must adhere to and respect the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and accept its resolutions — in particular resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III), which emphasized the right of Palestine to establish a State and the return to Palestine of refugees who had been forcibly displaced. At that time, the General Assembly took note of Israel's statements and interpretations before the Special Political Committee, as well as its commitment vis-à-vis the implementation of the two resolutions. That pledge was noticeably ignored in the mechanisms of international accountability by Israel for many years.

The fact that the Security Council has not adopted any serious resolution with regard to Israel due to the objection of a well-known permanent member sends an erroneous message from the international community to Israel, namely, that Israel's State terrorism against the Palestinian people is acceptable. That makes States that are silent in the face of such crimes partners in the perpetration of those crimes.

Our meeting today is taking place as the entire world witnesses the displacement, destruction and killing of the Palestinian people in a manner unprecedented in modern history. That is being done through Israel's State terrorism against the unarmed Palestinian people. Israel is continuing to desecrate safe houses and places of worship, Islamic and Christian alike. It is also continuing excavations around those sites, under the pretext of seeking archeological artifacts. That is particularly the case at the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound and the Mughrabi Gate.

Israel is also continuing to expand its settlements in Jerusalem, its policy of collective punishment, the killing of hundreds of Palestinian women, children and the elderly, the building of its apartheid wall, expansion of settlements, and the destruction of infrastructure. It is also continuing to confiscate land, to raze agricultural land and to pursue its policies of detention and physical liquidation and assassination of democratically elected symbolic representatives of the Palestinian people.

Recent United Nations reports, including those of special rapporteurs of the international community, have illustrated the suffering of the Palestinian people as a result of Israel's targeted extrajudicial killings, collective punishment and destruction of all the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, which is under a suffocating siege due to the closure of crossings. That has made the Gaza Strip the world's largest jail, with a population deprived of basic needs.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 has reaffirmed that Israel is violating the proscription on collective punishment against an occupied people as set out in article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The cutting off of electricity and water supplies, the demolition of public buildings and the imposition of restrictions on the freedom of movement — all of which have been documented in United Nations reports — have an impact on the public health, nutrition, family life and psychological well-being of the Palestinian people. All of that constitutes a grave case of collective punishment and war crimes under international law and international humanitarian law.

All these Israeli practices have occurred since Israel put forth its unilateral plan to withdraw from Gaza, which it said was based on its desire for peace. However, Israel in fact continues to control the Gaza Strip's air space and its terrestrial and coastal borders. It is exercising this control in an effort to suppress the aspirations of the Palestinian people and to prevent them from exercising their humanitarian rights guaranteed under international law. The recent Israeli decision to declare the Gaza Strip hostile territory — which was followed by the cutting off of vital supplies such as fuel, electricity and water — was a further decision underscoring the fact that Israel is an outlaw State, that its collective punishments are but war crimes and that it enjoys legal and political impunity.

The Security Council and the international community should abandon their failure and paralysis with regard to deterring Israel from carrying out such policies. It is also important that the Council avoid double standards and take urgent and immediate steps with regard to Israel's illegal practices, so as to preserve its credibility and role in the maintenance of international peace and security. Given that the Security Council has yet to do so, Israel is continuing to refuse to implement the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion calling for an end to the construction and for the demolition of Israel's apartheid wall on occupied Palestinian territory. The building of the wall, in addition to the Israeli practices to which I have referred, has heightened the daily suffering of the Palestinian people in the West Bank. We agree here with recent United Nations reports that have referred to the importance of the Security Council's urging Israel to implement the advisory opinion and resolution ES-10/15, adopted by the General Assembly during its tenth emergency special session. The provisions of that resolution called on Israel to honour its legal obligation to halt the construction of the wall and to dismantle the parts that have already been built in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Israel is continuing to expand its settlements in the West Bank, to destroy property, to confiscate land and to carry out military incursions and extrajudicial killings. The number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails has now reached 11,000, including 400 children and dozens of parliamentarians, including the Speaker of the Palestinian Parliament himself. The number of Palestinians martyred by Israel since 2000 has reached 4,000, including more than 1,000 children.

A meeting was held at Annapolis on 27 November 2007 to relaunch the peace process between Arab parties and Israel. The Syrian Arab Republic participated in the deliberations of that meeting, owing to its keen interest to contribute to any international effort intended to bring about just and comprehensive peace in the region by starting talks on all the tracks of the peace process. Syria hopes that that process will end Israel's occupation of occupied Arab territories in Palestine, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, as well as occupied Syrian Golan and Lebanon's Shab'a farms.

In conclusion, Syria continues to believe that bringing about a just and comprehensive peace is possible only through Israel's implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); and 497 (1981), on the Syrian Golan, as well as the revitalization of the peace process begun at Madrid in 1991 and the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted at the Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002 and subsequently reaffirmed at the 2007 Riyadh Summit. That is the way to halt the cycle of violence and bloodshed that threatens the security and stability of the region, as well as international peace and security as a whole.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): It is most significant indeed that we are holding this debate today in the midst of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and the tremendous efforts by various quarters to bring peace to the Palestinians and to all nations of the Middle East region. The International Day of Solidarity is the occasion when the international community reaffirms its commitment to the Palestinian people and to the establishment of an independent and sovereign state of Palestine. We take this opportunity to urge the international community not only to express its feelings of solidarity but to accept the challenge of bringing the violence, uncertainty and suffering in Palestine to an end.

At present, Palestinians continue to face various hardships and challenges. At the crux of the problem lies the continued denial of their inalienable right to self-determination. Indonesia has consistently been, and will continue to be, at the Palestinians' side in their legitimate quest for self-determination and independence. Although we are geographically worlds apart, we are united by our belief that justice must be done to the Palestinian people, who are still living under occupation and, like many other nations, are entitled to peace and freedom.

The international community should collectively bring to an end the suffering of the Palestinian people, starting with re-energizing the peace process. Indonesia therefore welcomes various initiatives and diplomatic efforts to put in place a process with the goal of creating an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State. These include the recent Conference in Annapolis, which culminated in the Joint Understanding between the Palestinians and the Israelis. With the blueprint for follow-up negotiations to conclude a final solution by the end of 2008, we are hopeful that this is the beginning of the road to ending the conflict in a just, comprehensive and fair manner.

While we recognize that there are difficult days ahead in that process, my delegation is encouraged by the full commitment of all the parties to the exploration of every means to engender a peaceful resolution of the conflict. To that extent, last Tuesday's agreement by both parties to resume long-stalled negotiations immediately and on a biweekly basis is a significant and commendable step forward. We urge both sides to seize that momentum in order to reach a sustainable peaceful solution. At the same time, the international community, through this global institution, has the obligation to support and monitor the efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement, including the various initiatives and the Joint Understanding reached in Annapolis.

Efforts to revive the peace process can have traction only if Israel demonstrates a genuine desire to engage in the resolution of the core issues. For that to happen, the Security Council needs to ensure that Israel respects and abides by the resolutions of the United Nations relating to the conflict. We must reiterate that Israeli occupation remains the root cause of the conflict in the Middle East, with the Palestinian issue at the core of it. That has been acknowledged by countless resolutions of the United Nations, in particular, resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), and 1515 (2003), as well as the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 as endorsed by the Quartet. Consequently, a just and comprehensive solution to the conflict should resolve all outstanding core issues — such as those pertaining to borders, refugees, Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, water resources and security.

While the international community concentrates on reviving the peace process it is also important for Palestinians to unite. The unity of Palestinians is a prerequisite for sustainable peace. We continue to urge Palestinians to set their differences aside, through dialogue and reconciliation, and focus on the ultimate objective, namely, the realization of a sovereign and independent state where Palestinians live in peace and prosperity.

Pending the achievement of a just solution, the international community continues to have the obligation to assist the Palestinian people to alleviate the dire conditions under which they live. We must urgently and without delay address the worsening humanitarian situation, if we truly wish to nurture the seeds of peace in Palestine and convince the people to embrace the current peace efforts. On the basis of humanitarian need, such assistance should also go to all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In that regard, we welcome the conference planned for Paris on 17 December 2007. For our part, Indonesia, together with South Africa, will co-organize an Asia-Africa conference on capacity-building for Palestine next year, with the objective of strengthening the institutions needed to support the peace process and the Palestinian State.

Indonesia has always been supportive of efforts to bring about a speedy solution to the question of Palestine and to end the suffering of the Palestinian people. We stand ready to contribute to that process in order to realize an independent and prosperous Palestinian State living side by side in peace with Israel and other nations of the region. We continue to believe that we need a comprehensive approach to settle all the core issues resulting from the persistent occupation of Israel. We also concur with the assessment of the Secretary-General that no piecemeal solution can work in addressing this complex issue.

Finally, I would be remiss if I failed to express the appreciation of my delegation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its enduring support of the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination. Year after year, since it was established in 1975, it has defied difficult circumstances to carry out its mandate. We look forward to the day when its commitment and service will be rewarded with the fulfilment of the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to independence. Until that time, we will continue to support the extension of its very important mandate.

Ms. Jahan (Bangladesh): Our meeting today takes on added significance, as it coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On this auspicious occasion, Bangladesh joins the international community in reaffirming our full support for the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and freedom from continued occupation.

Year after year, we have held debates on the Palestinian question. Many important resolutions have been adopted by this body; yet the impasse continues and peace in the region remains ever-elusive.

The delegation of Bangladesh aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Cuba, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and by the representative of Pakistan, on behalf of Organization of the Islamic Conference. Given the importance of the matter, we would, however, like to highlight some of the points reaffirming our total solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The continued occupation of Palestine by Israel is the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. Since 1967, the people of Palestine have been denied their fundamental right to self-determination and the right to live freely in their own land. Millions of Palestinians have been living in refugee camps for generations, in abject poverty. Their sufferings have been multiplied by the relentless and disproportionate scale of violence with which Israel chooses to react.

The distress of the Palestinians is further compounded by the Israeli policy of collective punishment in the form of excessive and indiscriminate force, extrajudicial killings, constant military incursions, targeted assassinations and indiscriminate detention, the blockade of roads, the demolition of houses, the confiscation of properties, and restrictions on movement. The list can go on and on. All that is done with the ultimate intention of systematically stifling the spirit of a nation. The continued imposition of prolonged closures by Israel has isolated the Gaza strip from the other parts of the Palestinian territory. In the West Bank, normal life is also hampered by military operations, numerous checkpoints and the systematic policy of illegal settlement.

The indomitable spirit of the Palestinian people to seek freedom cannot be extinguished simply by brute force. Sooner or later, Israel must heed the voice of reason. Israel must realize that this approach has proved to be wrong.

Bangladesh remains deeply concerned by the continued illegal construction of the separation wall and associated restrictions on the movement of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. Such closures have resulted in halting commercial activities and the loss of thousands of jobs. More and more families are slipping into the poverty trap, fueling more unrest. With the unabated continuation of the construction of the wall, ignoring the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, the occupied territories are increasingly being fragmented into smaller parts. That will affect the viability of a future Palestine State and endanger the prospect of a political settlement. Bangladesh reiterates its call for the immediate dismantling of the wall and the withdrawal of restrictions on the movements of Palestinian civilians.

The Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates specific provisions about the responsibilities of an occupying Power. Israel, being a signatory to the Convention and an occupying Power, cannot legally or morally absolve itself of those obligations. Bangladesh urges the international community to ensure full compliance with the Convention by Israel.

While we are outraged by the brutal suppression of the Palestinian people by Israeli forces, we are also frustrated by the factional infighting and divisions among the Palestinian people. Such lack of unity gives a wrong impression and adds fuel to the fire, thus making peace ever more elusive. The Palestinian people must consolidate unity in their own national interest. Bangladesh believes that the full and sincere implementation of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions can only resolve the Palestinian crisis. Overcoming mistrust and suspicion, refraining from provocative acts, ending the violence and resuming the peace talks are the imperatives of the day.

Bangladesh is cautiously observing the outcome of the Annapolis conference. We welcome the announcement of the new push for peace. We would like to be hopeful, but with caution. The failed legacies of the past and the still unfulfilled promises of progress in the road map towards Palestinian Statehood now require a much more intensified, dedicated and comprehensive effort for concrete advancement. More importantly, it would require sincere determination to translate words into actions, promises into reality and aspirations into achievable goals.

We believe, as does the Secretary-General, that it is time to abandon piecemeal approaches to resolving the Middle East crisis and to start final status negotiations that deal with all the disputed issues. Bangladesh will remain supportive of all initiatives that would give momentum to the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express deep thanks and gratitude to you, Sir, for presiding over this important meeting. We wish you every success.

My delegation endorses the statements delivered by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan on behalf of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I also thank Ambassador Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of Senegal and Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for the Committee's report, which sheds light on the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Every year since the onset of the nakba — the tragedy that befell the Palestinian people in the middle of the previous century, which coincided both with the birth of their current plight and the establishment after the Second World War of the institutions of the international system, including the United Nations, that continue to dominate international relations — the situation has deteriorated. The human suffering; economic, social, health and cultural crises; and everything related to life and the environment have been continually exacerbated by the destructive actions of the Israeli occupying Power.

Hope often springs from the rubble and ruins of war and the destruction and pain it entails. Currently, all eyes are focused on the results of the Annapolis conference, hoping for concrete results. The Annapolis conference, convened by President George Bush of the United States of America to consider the situation in the Middle East, concluded its work on the evening of 27 November in a spirit of cautious optimism. The onset of continuous Israel-Palestinian negotiations on a final settlement leading to Israel's withdrawal to the borders of 4 June 1967, the return of the Palestinian refugees to their land, and the establishment of a Palestinian State, with its capital in East Jerusalem, will put an end to what is widely acknowledged to be the most bloody and tragic conflict in the Middle East.

Many who aspire to and dream of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East hope that the United States mediator, who will enjoy the solidarity and support of the international community and the United Nations, will play a positive and equitable role in putting an end to the conflict. Total withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and the return of East Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty are prerequisites for sustainable peace and the normalization of the situation in this sensitive region.

Those who believe that they can, indeed, keep occupied territories and impose a de facto situation, finding peace and security for themselves at the expense of the peace and stability of others, who think they can normalize the situation in that region according to their own vision are living an illusion, have never learned either the lessons of history or the history of the Holy Lands.

My Government emphasizes the importance of working towards a just and comprehensive peace in the region and believes that this can be realized by recognizing the need to relaunch Syrian-Israeli negotiations from the point where they were left off — not to start again from scratch. These negotiations must have as their goal Israel's total withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and to have Israel commit itself to the promise that the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made to the Syrian Arab Republic — that Israel would withdraw totally from the occupied Golan.

My Government emphasizes the need to respect the sovereignty and stability of sisterly Lebanon. Lebanon has suffered the woes of wars launched by Israel, the last of which was in the summer of 2006. We need to resume negotiations along this track in a manner that would see an Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territories, including the Shab'a farms.

My country firmly believes that peace is an indivisible whole and cannot succeed in one single track without progress being realized simultaneously on the other tracks. We emphasize the importance of a comprehensive and just peace so that the region can cope with and join the train of peace and development as well as play its civilizational a role for which it has been known throughout history.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

United Nations A/62/PV.59

General Assembly

Sixty-second session

Official Records

59th plenary meeting

Friday, 30 November 2007, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim .... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 18 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/62/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/344)

Draft resolutions (A/62/L.18, A/62/L.19, A/62/L.20 and A/62/L.21)

Mr. Ahamed (India): I thank you, Sir, for scheduling this discussion on an important subject that requires our collective attention to an extent that almost nothing else does — the question of Palestine, set in the larger context of the situation in the Middle East. This discussion is particularly appropriately timed, as it follows the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people yesterday and the international Conference hosted at Annapolis earlier this week.

India has traditionally followed with close concern the developments in that volatile region. Our delegation has perused with attention the reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Middle East and on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. We have watched with concern as border restrictions, economic sanctions and a restrictive access regime have brought the Palestinian economy to the verge of collapse. We have viewed with alarm the continued vicious circle of attacks, reprisal and counterattacks, the worsening humanitarian and security situation in Gaza following developments in June this year, as well as the continued violence inflicted on innocent civilians.

Moreover, the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and the relentless construction of the separation wall threaten to create new facts on the ground and fresh grievances in an old conflict. The unresolved issues of last year's summer war in Lebanon and the long-pending question of the occupation of the Syrian Golan add to a sense of frustration and desperation. All those issues have the potential of exacting an immediate and long-term impact on the lives of the people, potentially contributing more fuel to an already combustible situation.

It is for that reason that India has consistently urged all concerned to eschew violence and exercise restraint on each of the all-too-frequent instances when violence has broken out, exacerbating suffering and misery in the region. It is in the interest of the entire international community that a comprehensive and peaceful solution to the problems besetting the Middle East be found at the earliest.

For India, commitment to the Palestinian cause has been a bedrock of its foreign policy since even before our independence. India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its attitude to the Palestinian question was inspired by its own freedom struggle, led by Mahatma Gandhi. In the early years of independent India, that policy was consolidated under the

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

leadership of our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In November 1947, India voted against the partition of Palestine in the General Assembly. As early as 1975, India recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. In 1988, it recognized Palestinian statehood, and in 1996 India opened its Representative Office to the State of Palestine.

I had the singular honour of having had a most memorable meeting with the late President Yasser Arafat in September 2004 at Ramallah, at which I had the opportunity to express India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for their cause. In fact, India's empathy with the Palestinian cause and its friendship with the people of Palestine constitute an integral and time-tested part of our foreign policy. I salute the indomitable spirit of the Palestinian people and reaffirm India's consistent, principled and unwavering support with their cause and their just struggle for a sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

It is widely recognized that the Middle East conflict is essentially political in nature, and therefore cannot be resolved by force. India has consistently called upon all parties in the region to fully cooperate with the efforts of the international community in that regard. We have supported the resumption of direct negotiations between the leaders of Palestine and Israel and the establishment, through peaceful negotiations, of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine living side by side and in peace with the State of Israel. We have supported the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. We have also called for comprehensive peace and stability in the region and supported the early resumption of dialogue on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks. Those issues must be addressed equally in order to achieve comprehensive and durable peace in the region.

It is against that backdrop that India welcomes the Joint Understanding reached by the President of Palestine and the Prime Minister of Israel earlier this week at Annapolis. In particular, India welcomes the direct dialogue between the leaders of Palestine and Israel, and looks forward to an early and peaceful resolution of all issues between Israel and Palestine and their peoples. It is also satisfying that the Middle East peace process will address the remaining issues on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks. We believe that the Arab Peace Initiative, which was re-launched at the Arab Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in March this year, provides a constructive framework to achieve such a comprehensive peace. We hope that post-Annapolis developments will proceed down a path that will enable a negotiated solution of the core issues, leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine living side by side and in peaceful co-existence with the State of Israel.

Given the complexity of that task, unprecedented determination, goodwill and capacity to offer and accept compromises and concessions are needed on all sides. It is in that regard that the members of the international community have a collective duty to help to create a favourable environment within which the principals can take the negotiations forward. India is ready to play a supportive role in that collective endeavour to achieve just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Salgueiro (Portugal): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries of Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine and Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The debate on the question of Palestine is taking place at a moment when hope for the peace process has been renewed by the historic results of the Annapolis Conference. The European Union commends the efforts of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and their firm commitment to the two-State solution as laid out in the road map and agreed between the parties, which is to result in an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. We congratulate them for the decision to immediately launch meaningful negotiations on all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception, as specified in previous agreements. The EU also welcomes the pledge made by the parties to reach an agreement before the end of 2008.

The Annapolis Conference represented a turning point for regional and international partners to effectively support a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In that context, the European

Union welcomes the initiative of President Bush and the wide and broad participation of key international actors.

The EU reaffirms its determination to support the efforts to reach comprehensive peace in the Middle East through a lasting and just settlement of the conflict based on the principle of land for peace, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and previous agreements reached between the parties.

In order to consolidate the progress achieved thus far and to fulfil the potential of the current process, it will be of the utmost importance that the parties take additional steps to meet previous commitments, including the commitments under the road map and the Agreement on Movement and Access, and that they desist from any actions that threaten the viability of a just and lasting settlement, in conformity with international law.

As the parties stressed in the Joint Understanding adopted at Annapolis, stopping all acts of violence and terror is of the utmost importance. The European Union strongly condemns the firing of rockets by Palestinian militias into Israeli territory. While recognizing Israel's right to self-defence, the EU calls on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint, and underlines that action should not be disproportionate or in contradiction with international law.

We reiterate our call for the immediate release of the abducted Israeli soldier and commend efforts, including by partners in the region, to that effect. We also repeat our call for the immediate release of Palestinian legislators detained in Israel.

The European Union reiterates its full commitment, in agreement with our partners in the Quartet, to continue to support the parties in their efforts towards peace and a two-State solution by making a wide-ranging contribution that includes support for developing the Palestinian security sector through the European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories. The European Union is also committed to strengthening its ongoing activities in support of the economic and financial development of the future Palestinian State through the continuation of assistance and in close cooperation with the Quartet's Representative. In that regard, we emphasize the importance of the Paris donor's conference, which represents an essential complement to the political process launched in Annapolis.

Mr. Saltanov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): For decades now, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been a source of constant tension that has brought suffering and deprivation to innocent people and has been a dangerously destabilizing factor in the international situation. The efforts undertaken for a settlement have occasionally produced hopes that peace would be established in the region, only to then lurch backwards and cause great disappointment. That is particularly true of the attempts to resolve the key problem, which is the Palestinian issue. After the Oslo agreements, it has been impossible to make any kind of progress on that aspect. Furthermore, since 2000, Palestinian and Israeli relations have been marked by bloodshed, terror and very severe reprisals.

On 26 and 27 November 2007, an important event took place that reopened the prospects for the re-establishment of the Middle East peace process. The international Conference held in Annapolis gave a powerful impulse to the renewal of the Palestinian-Israeli talks. In all likelihood, we will be able to put an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories that started in 1967 and fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to create their own independent and viable State, laying the foundation for coexistence between that State and Israel in peace, good neighbourliness and security.

That event was the result of the courageous decision taken by the Government of Israel, headed by Mr. Olmert, and the Palestine National Administration, headed by their acknowledged leader, President Mahmoud Abbas, to start talks. It took place thanks to collective international support, first and foremost by the Middle East Quartet mediators. The energetic contribution by the United States played a particularly important part.

The Russian Federation has, for more than a decade now, favoured resolving the Palestinian problem on the basis of coexistence between the two States. It is precisely for that reason that we, as a member of the Quartet and in our national capacity, have done everything possible to promote the success of the Conference, having held over the last two months intensive contacts with the parties directly concerned and with those who have the potential for influence in the region.

The road to Annapolis was not a simple one. It is quite clear, however, that talks have begun and key matters will be taken up, including the settlement of the refugee question, Jerusalem, borders, water resources and other very sensitive problems rife with many difficulties. A search for compromise will be necessary, as will responsible steps by both parties to achieve agreements that will decide the future of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and the entire Middle East.

We believe that it will be possible to reach an agreement if we strictly abide by the established international legal basis. That means that confidence-building measures must also be implemented to ensure the success of those talks. First and foremost, we are talking about the implementation of the obligations that are from the first phase of the road map. Israel's anxiety regarding security should be allayed, as should that of the Palestinians regarding settlements, freedom of movement, Palestinian prisoners and other issues.

An important element for the successful conclusion of the dialogue within the agreed time frame — that is, during 2008 — will be the follow-up mechanism, including the convening of new international meetings. The ministerial meeting of donors in Paris, which has been planned for December 2007, will agree on a set of measures aimed at the creation and consolidation of the Palestinian State.

The Russian proposal to organize a meeting in Moscow on the Middle East settlement is also on the table and has received broad support. We intend, at the forthcoming ministerial meeting of the Quartet and in contact with interested parties, to continue the discussion of the possible agenda and time frame for that event. It is also clear that, in the interests of a phased movement towards a full-fledged Palestinian State, we must overcome the dividing up of the Palestinian territories and restore the unity of the Palestinians.

It is perfectly clear to all of us that a genuine peace in the Middle East must be a comprehensive peace. The appeals to renew efforts towards such a peace were clearly heard at the recent Conference. In that connection, it is extremely important that the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon participate in its work — something that the Russian Federation has actively promoted. Indeed, stabilization in the region cannot be guaranteed until the question of the Golan Heights has been resolved and the settlement of other questions regarding relations between Israel, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon has started. On the other hand, starting a dialogue on those problems will give full force to that process and sustainability to the peace process, including on the Israel-Palestine track. The Russian Federation favours proceeding to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement on all tracks, including the Syrian, Lebanese and multilateral tracks.

The preparation for and convening of a comprehensive international conference would make it possible for practical efforts to be made. There is a well-tried mechanism for the implementation of such work: the collective actions of the Quartet and their interaction with Israel, the League of Arab States and other members of the international community.

Finally and most importantly, there is a sound international legal basis for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement: the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Madrid principles, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, including the parameters for the normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab States. The Russian Federation will continue to actively promote the renewal and progress towards a stable and sound peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Beck (Palau), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Nguyen Tat Thanh (Viet Nam): I have the privilege to deliver this statement on behalf of His Excellency, Ambassador Le Luong Minh, Permanent Representative of Viet Nam, who is currently engaged in another important meeting.

> "It is a great honour for me to speak in this forum on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Allow me, at the outset, to convey to the Government and people of Palestine our most heart-felt congratulations. I sincerely thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Mr. Paul Badji, for their detailed and comprehensive reports.
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> "My delegation associates itself with the statement made earlier by Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.
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> "Sixty years after the General Assembly passed resolution 181 (II) on the partition plan and 40 years after the Security Council adopted

resolution 242 (1967) on the Arab-Israeli conflict, peace in the Middle East remains elusive and the people of Palestine are still stateless. The plight of the Palestinian people worsens with every passing day through the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic, social, political and security situation, which is due to the recent excessive and indiscriminate use of force in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. We are especially concerned by the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, we are concerned by the attacks that target Israeli civilians, killing innocent people and undermining the peace process.

"At the opening of the 2007 session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People earlier this year, the Secretary-General reminded delegates that neither the Palestinian people nor the Israeli people can achieve their respective legitimate demands of freedom, dignity and long-term security without a settlement of the Palestine-Israel conflict. He went on to call for efforts this year to reverse the trends of 2006, in which, he rightly pointed out, nearly all developments took us further from the goal shared by a majority of Israelis and Palestinians, namely, two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

"In this connection, realizing the urgent need for an immediate resumption of direct and substantive negotiations between all parties concerned for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution based on the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, on the agreements entered into by the concerned parties and on the land-for-peace principle, we hail the recent efforts by the Quartet. We especially welcome the holding by the United States of the Annapolis Conference on 27 November, aimed at resuming dialogue between Israel and Palestine.

"The convening of that Conference and the participation of more than 40 countries, among them many Arab countries, whose role is indispensable in any solution for the Middle East issue is a praiseworthy development. We continue to support the Arab Peace Initiative put forth at the 14th Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002. My country welcomes the intentions of France and Russia to hold similar events in support of the anticipated negotiations among the concerned parties.

"Deeply encouraged by the Joint Understanding agreed on by the Israeli and Palestinian leaders at the Annapolis Conference, reflecting their determination to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008, we urge both sides to build on that momentum to move the Middle East peace process forward. While welcoming the recent announcement by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel on the scheduling of a freeze on the construction of new settlements in the occupied West Bank and the release of Palestinian prisoners, we call upon Israel to put an immediate end to all military operations and incursions into the Palestinian territories and to its ongoing efforts to complete the construction of the separation wall on Palestinian land. This would create a favourable atmosphere for the resumption of peace talks and final status negotiations on a two-State solution.

"Only through a negotiated solution that takes into account the legitimate rights of all parties concerned can the Middle East question, with the Israel-Palestine conflict at its core, be satisfactorily addressed and ultimately resolved. Viet Nam looks forward to continuing to contribute to the efforts of the international community towards this end.

"Finally, I wish to reiterate Viet Nam's consistent position in support of the establishment of a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, where, at long last, Palestinians can live in peace, independence, freedom and dignity."

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, and on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish to reiterate our solidarity with the people of Palestine in their tireless efforts and unwavering determination to pursue their national aspirations and in their courageous struggle to defend their inalienable rights.

The recent United Nations reports on the question of Palestine, particularly the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the report of the Special

Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories yet again bear witness to the unfortunate reality that, in the past 12 months, the Zionist regime has continued its crimes against the defenceless Palestinian people, and has been "systematically altering the Palestinian land through unlawful policies and practices, including settlement construction and, more recently, the construction of the wall in the West Bank" (*A/62/35, para. 17*).

As the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People indicates, the Israeli regime has, throughout the period under review, continued its criminal practices against Palestinians through unlawful measures such as extrajudicial killings, house demolitions, unlawful detention of Palestinian authorities, humiliating systems of checkpoints, expanding illegal settlements, construction of the unlawful wall in contravention of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, periodic closures, the sealing off of the Gaza Strip, as well as the destruction of Palestinian civilian infrastructure and agricultural lands. These actions have resulted in unspeakable sufferings and losses for the Palestinian people, including the death and injury of hundreds of Palestinians, and have caused an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Palestinian society.

In addition, the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories highlights other shocking aspects of the Israeli regime's policies and practices in violation of the most basic principles of international law and human rights in the Palestinian territories. What happened in Beit Hanoun is a clear example of Israeli brutality against the Palestinians in the period under review. According to the report,

> "Beit Hanoun ... was subjected to particularly vicious military action ... 82 Palestinians, at least half of whom were civilians (including 21 children), were killed ... More than 260 people, including 60 children, were injured and hundreds of males between the ages of 16 and 40 were arrested. Forty thousand residents were confined to their homes as a result of a curfew as Israeli tanks and bulldozers rampaged through their town, destroying 279 homes, an 850-year-old mosque, public buildings, electricity networks, schools and hospitals, levelling orchards and digging up roads, water mains and sewage networks" (*A/HRC/4/17, para. 10*).

Moreover, according to the aforementioned United Nations reports, poverty and unemployment in the occupied Palestinian territories have reached their highest level. Health and education have been undermined, and the entire social fabric of society is threatened.

The continuation of Israel's unlawful policies and practices in the occupied Syrian Golan not only is a source of tension in the region, but is also a matter of grave concern for the international community. The Israeli regime has made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of the area by establishing new settlements and imposing their laws on Syrian citizens in contravention of all relevant United Nations resolutions.

Furthermore, the said regime's constant and continuous threats against Lebanon, as well as its occupation of Lebanese lands and daily violations of Lebanese airspace and harassment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), are a clear infringement of resolution 1701 (2006). On many occasions, and as recently as 6 November 2007, the United Nations has protested the daily air violations of Lebanese airspace, and has called on Israelis to stop these operations, which are violating Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and increasing tensions in the area. As in the past, the response of the Israeli regime to these calls has been complete defiance and contempt.

Undoubtedly, the unqualified support extended to the Israeli regime by a permanent member of the Security Council has served to embolden it to continue with its crimes against the defenceless Palestinians and other peoples in the region, and has made it more brazen in adamantly violating and defying a host of Security Council resolutions, as well as the resolutions of other United Nations organs.

It is evident that the settlement of the Palestinian issue is imperative and indispensable for the attainment of a comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. Peace in the region cannot be achieved through aggression, State terrorism, intimidation and occupation. Nor can it be attained through so-called initiatives or conferences that pursue other politically motivated goals rather than realizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We believe that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region will remain elusive until all the rights of the Palestinian people, including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland and the establishment of a Palestinian State, are fully and unconditionally restored. Solutions to the Palestinian crisis will come about through genuine actions on the ground in Palestine and by the Palestinians themselves. Only through national unity and collective action can the Palestinians attain their long-awaited aspirations and goals.

In view of past experiences, the international community and the people of the region cannot be misled by politically motivated moves, such as the recent meeting in Annapolis, which are intended to accord legitimacy to the forces of occupation and aggression. In the past few days, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the occupied territories have expressed their dismay and anguish at such moves.

Undoubtedly, as has been repeatedly stressed by the officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a durable peace in Palestine and the Middle East will only be possible through justice, the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people, an end to discrimination, an end to occupation, the return of all Palestinian refugees and a democratic mechanism through which all inhabitants of Palestine, as well as Palestinians driven out of their homeland, would have the possibility to determine their future in a democratic and peaceful fashion.

Before concluding, I wish to take this opportunity to place on record that my delegation rejects the baseless allegations and distortions raised against my country in the Assembly yesterday by the representative of the Israeli regime. The said regime poses the sole and most serious and urgent threat facing the world and region today. It should be urgently and decisively countered by the international community. Who is unaware that this regime has brought nothing but terror, bloodshed, aggression, occupation and misery for the region and for the world? The reports currently before the Assembly and numerous others will testify to this reality.

Finally, I would like to extend our appreciation to the President for having convened this meeting, and to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their tireless efforts to address the torment and onerous circumstances of the people of Palestine, as well as for their informative reports in this regard.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement made by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

On behalf of my delegation, it gives me great pleasure to thank His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the members of the Committee for their strong and vital efforts to support the just Palestinian cause and to uncover the facts about Israeli practices.

On the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Government and the People of the United Arab Emirates reaffirm their continued support for and solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people in their just struggle to realize their legitimate aspirations to establish their independent State, like all other peoples of the world.

This year's deliberations acquire special importance due to the very critical developments relating to the Palestinian question, which are reflected in the seriously deteriorating humanitarian, security and political conditions of the Palestinian people inside and outside the occupied territories on the one hand, and in the Annapolis peace Conference on the other. The United Arab Emirates has participated in good faith with other Arab countries in that Conference with a view to undertaking practical, concrete and effective steps to break the current impasse in the peace process in the Middle East. The essence of the peace process has been and remains bringing Israel to full compliance with international legitimacy that requires it to end its illegal and illegitimate occupation of all Arab and Palestinian territories by withdrawal to the June 1967 borders.

We in the United Arab Emirates have repeatedly expressed our total rejection of Israeli expansion activities in the region and their illegal implications, which are manifested in the confiscation of Arab and Palestinian territories and their natural resources. That represents a grave breach of the provisions of international law and humanitarian international law, which can no longer be ignored by the international community.

The United Arab Emirates expresses its grave concern over the continued Israeli aggression revealed in the recent reports of the Secretary-General, which graphically illustrate the effects of the unjustified and illegal construction of the separation wall and the building of more settlements inside the Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan, as well as the collective punitive measures taken daily against Palestinians, including repeated Israeli incursions and aggressions in a number of Palestinian cities and villages; extrajudicial killings, excessive violence and the arbitrary arrest of thousands of civilians, including women and children; the large-scale demolition of Palestinian homes and of social and economic structures; and the imposition of strict restrictions on the movement of persons and goods. All those actions have resulted in the total isolation of Gaza and its population and their deprivation of food aid and primary commodities essential for survival, including energy.

My country considers the Annapolis Conference, hosted by the United States on 27 November and attended by parties involved in the Arab-Israeli peace process, to be a positive step in the right direction towards bringing the Arab-Israeli peace process back on track, which calls for further effective efforts at the regional and international levels. Such efforts should be made either through the mechanism announced at the Annapolis Conference under the supervision of the United States, or within the United Nations system and the Security Council, in particular under the mandate conferred upon it by the Charter, and in the framework of the Quartet through a fair and neutral approach so as to ensure that the political momentum generated at the Annapolis Conference towards advancing the direct, effective and comprehensive negotiations on all Arab-Israeli tracks is sustained. Efforts should also be made pursuant to the provisions of the resolutions of international legality, the road map, and the Arab peace initiative in order to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli struggle in the Middle East.

In that context, we call for the following necessary steps to be taken.

First, Israel, the occupying Power must, on an urgent priority basis, undertake fully to cease its aggressive policies against the Palestinians, release the prisoners detained in the thousands, and end its raids and siege of Gaza. Israel must also desist from obstructing access to emergency humanitarian assistance as a result of its illegal practices, which are in violation of international humanitarian law in letter and spirit and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War. In that context, we also expect the international community to work, within the framework of the Paris donors' conference scheduled for 17 December, on doubling its financial and development assistance to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate their current plight and enable the Palestinian Authority to rebuild and reform its national institutions.

Secondly, Israel must take full and immediate measures, under international supervision, to cease all settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem; to remove the existing settlements and the separation wall from the West Bank and the areas surrounding Al-Quds; and to compensate those affected by the wall in accordance with its obligations under the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and the advisory opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice in that regard. We also urge the international community to compel Israel immediately and speedily to halt all illegal actions in East Jerusalem affecting Muslim and Christian shrines.

Thirdly, in the context of its confidence-building measures, Israel must implement a full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal from all Palestinian cities and villages of the West Bank reoccupied on 28 September 2000, and demonstrate its serious and unconditional compliance with international legal resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) during its negotiations with the Palestinian Authority on all the final status issues in order to ensure, within a specific time frame, the elimination of all settlements; the achievement of a just settlement for the Palestinian refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III); a resolution to the dispute over Jerusalem; and a definitive demarcation of the borders between the Israeli and Palestinian States based on the road map and the Arab peace initiative, which calls for Israel's total and unconditional withdrawal from all Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including

Al-Quds Al-Sharif. That will reflect Israel's serious intention to seek a true peace in the region and to establish an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side in peace and security.

Fourthly, we call on Israel immediately to enter, without conditions, into sincere and serious negotiations with the Syrian Government with a view to reaching a just and lasting peace agreement that ensures the return of the Golan Heights to Syria.

Fifthly, we call on Israel to withdraw from the Lebanese Shab'a farms and Al-Ghajar village and to stop violating Lebanese airspace and land. Israel must also demonstrate its genuine and sincere intentions and cooperation in providing the required information on the mines and cluster explosives planted before its withdrawal from South Lebanon, in accordance with its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions and in order to bring peace and stability to Lebanon.

In conclusion, we hope that Israel has finally realized that its existence as a secure country that maintains normal and cooperative economic relations with States in the region requires it to modify its hostile stance towards the Palestinian People and neighbouring countries and to fulfil, on a non-selective basis, the demands of a true peace, which cannot be achieved without its full and unconditional withdrawal from all Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in order to establish an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living in mutual peace and security with its neighbours in the region.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting here to express our solidarity with the Palestinian people. We recognize that this occasion is of special significance this year in that it coincides with the launching of a new international quest for a solution to a struggle that dates back many decades and to an ever-deteriorating tragedy that is akin to an infected wound which all understand represents a threat to the security and stability of the Middle East and the entire world.

It is not enough to seek a solution merely by renewing international efforts after a long period of dormancy. Rather, what is required is that the world be ready to learn the lessons from the peace process that stumbled after it was launched in Madrid as well as understand that the situation which we are in today has resulted from a lack of a clear vision and from the loss of a resolute will to put an end to the last occupation in the world.

Lebanon went to the Annapolis Conference on the basis of an Arab consensus on the Arab Peace Initiative and in support of the national rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish a viable and sovereign independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. In this regard, we would like to reaffirm that marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is important because of what they have been suffering for the last 40 years, since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and because of the passage of 60 years since the beginning of the refugee tragedy.

We believe that this is a warning for the conscience of the world that the time has come to find a just solution to this conflict and to making it a priority. The realities of the occupation alone are unequivocal proof of the need to put an end to the struggle on the basis of enabling the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination in their independent State.

The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has almost been swallowed whole by settlements. Settlement activity has continued since 1967 and has not been deterred by any laws or international resolutions, negotiations, or even agreements. Today, there are more than 149 settlements that have dismembered the West Bank, transformed it into isolated cantons and separated East Jerusalem from its surroundings.

It is enough to point out here that these settlements and the lands attached to them, as well as the advanced settler outposts and Israeli military bases and their attached roads, occupy 38 per cent of the area of the West Bank. Furthermore, they are inhabited by 450,000 Israeli settlers while 2.4 million Palestinians live in very harsh conditions on what remains of the land.

This settlement expansion is also achieved at the expense of Palestinian land and water resources. Is there a need to explain the meaning of providing Israeli settlers four or five times as much water as Palestinian landowners? Is there any other way to describe this reality than to say that it is part of an abominable, hideous apartheid policy that should no longer exist?

This settlement expansion is conducted at the expense of the social and economic fabric of Palestinian society and at expense of Palestinians' freedom of movement in their already occupied land.

Is there any need to explain the meaning of constructing a separation barrier that goes through the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and whose length extends 525 kilometres and, once completed, will extend more than 731 kilometres, ultimately taking an additional 10.2 per cent of the land of the West Bank? The wall is made from hard cement blocks and electrified wires that break Jerusalem into sections and separate farmers from their land and trap families between the wall and the Green Line.

We would like to recall here that the construction of the wall did not stop for a single day even after the International Court of Justice, in its 2004 advisory opinion, stated that it was illegal and that it created a situation on the ground that was the equivalent of a de facto annexation. Additionally, the advisory opinion declared it Israel's duty to stop constructing the wall, to remove the segments already built and to compensate the Palestinians harmed by the construction. Moreover, the occupation has established almost 85 checkpoints and 572 roadblocks which alone have transformed the daily lives of Palestinians into a living hell.

My presentation seems long but it is a part of the continuing tragedy in the West Bank.

As for the Gaza Strip, life there has become almost impossible with the imposition of collective punishment on the pretext of combating terrorism and terrorists. Is it not enough that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has said that it is no longer able to provide more than 61 per cent of the daily caloric requirements for about 1.2 million residents of the Gaza Strip who rely for their nutrition on United Nations aid? Is it not enough to witness the collapse of the educational system, as demonstrated by the unprecedentedly high rate of failure in basic education?

We are not presenting the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation for the sake of painting a picture. Rather, we hope that the world will see these harsh realities and learn from them in order to push forward the renewed efforts for peace. The Palestinian reality can no longer stand any more promises or delayed dates. Only practical and tangible measures are a true measure of any serious efforts to find a solution. Such efforts can be materialized through an immediate end to all forms of settlements, regardless of what they are called, the removal of checkpoints and roadblocks, the reopening of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem as well as a halt to the construction of the separation wall. Limited and expanded military operations in the Palestinian territories must also be stopped. Prisoners, who number over 10,000 — among them children and mothers with their own children — must be released.

If the aim is to truly reach a final solution, then we cannot ignore the fact that the refugee problem has always been the main issue. Today, there are more than 4.4 million refugees living in limbo. Most of these refugees come from families that were displaced in 1948 because of the terrorist operations and organized massacres. It is enough to mention the Deir Yassin massacre to make the hairs on the back of our neck stand up. When the military attacks stopped, Israel prevented those who fled from returning to their homes. It even confiscated their property, taking the view that those people were absent. Israel destroyed hundreds of villages, believing that this destruction would annihilate the history and the rights of their inhabitants.

Here, my country, Lebanon, would like to affirm the need to resolve the refugee issue, based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and its flat rejection of having the refugees resettle on Lebanese land, because such resettlement would threaten the Lebanese national fabric and entity, just as it would threaten the national identity of Palestinian refugees.

No peace or stability is possible without a comprehensive solution that would include an Israeli withdrawal from all Arab lands occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan, the Shab'a farms, and the Kfar Shouba Hills, as well as the occupied parts of al-Ghajar village in Lebanon and the release of Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails.

Today, we do not want a new peace process that would lead us through another maze of procrastination and delays. Rather, what we need are practical measures that would finally lead to a just and comprehensive peace.

Mr. Abdul Azeez (Sri Lanka): My delegation would like to express its deep appreciation to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ambassador Paul Badji of Senegal, and the other members of the Committee for their efforts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We would also like to thank the Committee for its report presented to us (A/62/35).

The position of the Government of Sri Lanka on the question of Palestine has remained unchanged over the years. That was reaffirmed by His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, in his message issued on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which I wish to quote.

> "On the solemn occasion to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, on behalf of my Government and the people of Sri Lanka, I take this opportunity to reiterate our unequivocal and sincere support for the people and the Government of Palestine for their just struggle to achieve their inalienable rights, including the right to statehood. Over the last four decades, Palestinian people have been undergoing immense hardships and deprivation of their legitimate rights, with no end in sight. We share the aspirations of many thousands of Palestinian people living in occupied territories. I have closely associated myself with the cause of the Palestinian people over the last 30 years. It is my sincere hope and belief that the continuing efforts by the international community, including the ongoing efforts by the Quartet and other individual member countries, will pave the way towards a permanent and negotiated settlement to the question of Palestine, leading to an independent and democratic State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security."

The illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory remains the main issue of the question of Palestine. The occupation has continued far too long, and its consequences have brought immeasurable hardships to the Palestinian people, caused disruption to their living conditions and resulted in the destruction of homes and infrastructure in the occupied territory.

During the period under review, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has continued to deteriorate due to Israeli military activities and the restrictions imposed by it on the Palestinian people affecting every aspect of their lives. The escalation of violence on both sides has contributed to the further deterioration of the situation. We are concerned that the continuation of Israeli settlement activities and the building of a wall in the occupied territories pose a grave threat to the prospects for a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people must be respected, and a solution to the question of Palestine should be achieved on the basis of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territory, respect for the right of all to live in peace and security and the recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are among the essential principles for a lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Sri Lanka wishes to reiterate its strong support to the Palestinian people and their leadership in their efforts towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine. In that regard, the unity of the Palestinian people is a prerequisite for the achievement of a durable solution. We hope that all factions of the Palestinian leadership will unite in support of President Mahmoud Abbas and his Government.

We would also like to express our support for the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and for the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of President Abbas. It is important that the national and democratic institutions of the Palestinian Authority are maintained and protected, as they will constitute the vital foundation of the future independent Palestinian State.

It is encouraging to note the ongoing efforts to revive the peace process. The leaders of Israel and Palestine agreed at Annapolis to work together to arrive at a final solution before the end of 2008. Sri Lanka welcomes that development and would like to compliment the two leaders for their renewed commitment to pursuit of peace. We hope that those efforts will lead to the end of the occupation and to a final agreement for both Palestinian and Israelis to live side by side within secure and recognized boundaries.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to associate myself with the statements delivered by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I would also like to express my gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his comprehensive and valuable report (A/62/344).

On this, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the pleasure to extend my profound thanks to the President of the Assembly for his interest in the question of Palestine. I also wish to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairperson, Mr. Paul Badji, the Permanent Representative of the brotherly Republic of Senegal, as well all the other members of the Committee's Bureau, for their extensive efforts to ensure that the Palestinian people enjoy their full rights, and to mobilize international support for their legitimate demands.

As the Assembly is aware, 60 years since the adoption of the historic 1947 resolution intended to divide Palestine into Palestinian and Israeli States, the Palestinian people continue to live under the yoke of occupation and to be deprived of all their legitimate rights, including the rights to self-determination and to establish their own independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. It is the duty of the international community to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people by convincing the State of Israel of the need to implement relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, as military confrontation, the use of force and the imposition of fait accompli policies are all rejected by every international norm and have led the two parties to stalemate. The only hope lies in adopting the language of dialogue and understanding instead of that of violence and war.

The recent holding of the Annapolis Conference, which resulted in renewed determination by the parties concerned to resume dialogue, provides a glimmer of hope of reaching a just and permanent solution to this long-standing conflict. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, which welcomes the preliminary results of the Conference and the hope it has engendered following a long stalemate, calls upon all parties to honour the timetable established at the Conference and to work to build confidence through dialogue and understanding.

My country, which took part in the deliberations of the Conference, in accordance with its strong commitment to support its Palestinian brothers, appreciates the important role played by the United States of America to convene the Conference, as well as its pledge to continue to pursue negotiations under its auspices. In that regard, we welcome the political will expressed both by Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, and Mr. Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister of Israel, as well as the Joint Understanding they endorsed in the presence of American President George Bush and of more than 40 countries and organizations. We hope that the Conference will in fact relaunch the search for a just and lasting solution that leads to the establishment, before the end of 2008, of the Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania will spare no effort to achieve that goal, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and resolutions of international legitimacy, in defence of justice and truth and the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr. Li Junhua (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Once again, the Middle East is standing at a critical crossroads, where a rare window of opportunity has opened up. At the just concluded Annapolis Conference, President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared a Joint Understanding in which both leaders expressed their determination to immediately launch negotiations to resolve all core issues, with a view to concluding a peace treaty before the end of 2008. Representatives from over 40 countries and international organizations witnessed that historic moment. China welcomes the political resolve for peace, as demonstrated by the leaders of Palestine and Israel alike, and appreciates the efforts of all the parties concerned, especially the host, that contributed to the success of the Conference.

The success of the Annapolis Conference has given rise to new hopes for the revival of the Middle East peace process after years of stagnation. The broad consensus and strong aspirations of the international community — to build an independent Palestinian State and to enable the two States, Palestine and Israel, and the two peoples, Arab and Jewish, to live side by side in peace — have been confirmed by the Conference. There is no viable way to achieve that goal other than to negotiate on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Quartet road map and the Arab peace initiative.

The Annapolis Conference is a good beginning, sending out an encouraging signal. We have reason to be optimistic, but the forthcoming negotiations will prove to be daunting. Peace may remain elusive should the opportunity fail to be seized. We have to remain sober and never underestimate the challenges and difficulties ahead.

With the support of the international community, the Palestinian and Israeli sides should seize the opportunity, negotiate in good faith, and work out an early agreement on all issues concerning final status. Both sides should work to create an atmosphere conducive to negotiation, including by maintaining the goodwill and confidence-building measures that were taken recently. Both sides should implement in earnest their respective obligations under the first phase of the Quartet road map and consolidate broader internal consensus. We believe that Israel should further respond to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, including by facilitating the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The international community has an important role to play and should stand ready to assist in whatever manner might be helpful. The international community, including the United Nations, should provide steadfast political support for the negotiations between Israel and Palestine. Meanwhile, it is appropriate to consider inclusive, balanced and effective multilateral mechanisms for facilitation, monitoring and implementation so as to provide guarantees for peace.

A united, independent and prosperous Palestinian State would be a solid foundation for the security of the entire Middle East. The international community should increase its humanitarian and development aid to the Palestinian people with a view to accelerating institution-building, economic development and social rehabilitation in Palestine. Meanwhile, conditions should be created to promote regional trade and communications so that all peoples in the region may truly enjoy the fruits of exchange and cooperation.

While the Palestinian question lies at the core of the Middle East question, negotiations between Israel and both Syria and Lebanon constitute equally important and integral parts of the Middle East peace process. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution will depend on the settlement of all issues of concern in the Middle East. Restarting the negotiations between Israel and Syria or Lebanon in due time and achieving progress on either track will contribute to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and may even mutually reinforce the negotiation process between Palestine and Israel.

It is alarming to note that the tension in Lebanon has remained unabated over the past year, plunging the country into an endless cycle of political crises. With disputes on the presidential election evolving, we hope that all parties in Lebanon will stay calm and settle their differences by seeking common ground through political consultation. Meanwhile, we hope that Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) will continue to be implemented in a comprehensive and balanced manner.

Sixty years ago yesterday, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) on the partition of Palestine. A week ago, we commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). Often referred to as a land of milk and honey, Palestine has instead had too much bloodshed and tears. All parties have a high stake in the Middle East peace process; any stagnation, setback or frustration of the process can carry with it enormous risks and great costs. No matter how difficult they may be, all attempts to achieve peace should be encouraged. It is the joint responsibility of the international community to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East at an early date.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly's consideration of agenda item 18 on the question of Palestine is a new opportunity for my delegation to express its unswerving support for the Palestinian cause and its ongoing solidarity with the Palestinian people. It is in that spirit that we have quite naturally participated, side by side with our Palestinian brothers, in the celebration on 29 November every year of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

We associate ourselves with the statements made by the representatives of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

This solemn celebration transcends the accepted meaning of the word because it recalls, on the one hand, the commitment and unshakable resolve of the Palestinian people to live free and in peace, and on the other, the manner in which the international community has failed to act consistently, boldly and authoritatively to end a conflict that has dragged out endlessly. Someone has said that "in remembrance there is hope", and that, in our opinion, clearly reflects the way we perceive this day of commemoration. It is quite true that the past sheds a pitiless light on the present and, undoubtedly, on the future.

We are also deeply convinced that the history of the Palestinian people will remain incomprehensible to anyone who does not recall the original wound and the historic injustice inflicted by the act that deprived it of its land and its own identity. That wound, which we imagined to have been healed by the passing years, is reopened every time an opportunity is missed or some formula or initiative fails because of a lack of boldness or clarity of vision. As a direct consequence of those circumstances, the Palestinian people, disheartened and disillusioned by decades of misleadingly reassuring statements and broken promises, wants something tangible to happen.

A hope was born in Annapolis, led by the political will of the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, who publicly and solemnly committed themselves to pursuing dialogue in order to finalize by late 2008 the terms of a comprehensive peace agreement that would enshrine the lasting and just settlement of all pending questions and lead to the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

At this critical moment, we are convinced that the international community has the moral duty to help the parties to translate that new resolve to resume dialogue into a genuine dynamic of peace that will be fed by tangible progress on so-called final status issues. That resolve will also have to be mobilized around the vision articulated by the Security Council in its relevant resolutions, to which the Arab peace initiative and the Quartet's road map have leant operational content and a clear political horizon. The definitive goal of such a vision must inevitably be the creation of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

That is clearly no easy task, but underlying its apparent complexity, the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security is not impossible to achieve. If that vision is to become concrete reality, the full cooperation of the parties to the conflict throughout the process will be of capital importance, for they will have to address all substantive questions with the necessary political will.

Faithful to its attachment to just causes throughout the world, Algeria supports the peace process and its ultimate goal of accelerating the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, with all Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. That solidarity is inseparable from our history and our unwavering support for the rights of peoples to self-determination and the struggle for freedom. In the specific case of Palestine, our long-term vision is based on the multiplying effect that a final settlement of this question could have. It would be the driving force behind a momentum for peace, spreading its benefits throughout the region.

Any prospect other than that of a lasting and just peace in this tormented region can only worsen hotspots of tension and fuel the frustration in Arab and Muslim public opinion, thus deepening misunderstanding and contributing to intolerance and extremism of all kinds.

The implementation of confidence-building measures — particularly with regard to freezing settlements, freeing Palestinian prisoners and lifting the drastic restrictions imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, on the movement of goods and persons within the Palestinian territories and between them and the rest of the world — would undoubtedly be a token of goodwill. The recently concluded Annapolis Conference underlined the urgent need for such measures and their fundamental importance with a view to making progress towards a just and lasting agreement.

In addition to those agreed aspects, what we continue to need most is a visionary, magnanimous and imaginative approach that respects international legality and is based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions, while opening new avenues and creating new hopes.

Mr. Mohamad (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of my delegation, I should like to join preceding speakers in thanking Ambassador Kerim for his skilful leadership of the work of the General Assembly at the present session. We also wish to associate ourselves with the statements made by the Permanent

Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

My delegation takes note with great interest the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/62/35). We sincerely thank Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee, and the other Committee members for their efforts in preparing that comprehensive report, which describes events that have taken place in the occupied Palestinian territory. We hope that their efforts will continue to raise awareness of the international community by sounding the alarm about the gravity of the situation, so that greater endeavours will be made to achieve justice and legitimacy for the Palestinian people and to help them establish an independent State of their own. We have also read the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/344), the contents of which do not differ from those of the Committee's report.

Here, we should also like to express our appreciation to United Nations humanitarian workers in the occupied Palestinian territories, some of whom have sacrificed their lives as they worked to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. In particular, we wish to thank the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and all those who work with it.

My country is following with great concern the developments in the Palestinian territories described in the reports of the Secretary-General and of the Committee. We also wish to express our alarm at the scenes broadcast daily by the news media depicting the horrendous nature of the Israeli occupation. Israel, the occupying Power, is carrying out its policy of occupation and settlement expansion at an even swifter pace than in recent years, ignoring all relevant United Nations resolutions, including, inter alia, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

In addition to expanding its settlements at the expense of Palestinian villages and lands, Israel has continued its military operations in the West Bank, claiming hundreds of civilians, including women and children, as its victims. It has also destroyed infrastructure and prevented patients from reaching hospitals. It has even prevented humanitarian and relief workers from reaching those in need.

With regard to the separation wall, Israel has ignored the General Assembly's adoption of resolution ES-10/17 on that subject at its tenth emergency special session and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the illegality of that barbaric measure, continuing in its belligerent construction of the wall, to the detriment of Palestinian villages and agricultural lands. And one can only imagine the conditions of the thousands of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

In the Gaza Strip, the Israeli authorities have carried out repeated military strikes against villages, killing dozens of Palestinians, most of them women and children. Israel has also imposed a tight siege on the Gaza Strip, has closed all crossing points and has adopted a policy of assassination. If anyone can invoke the right to self-defence, it is the Palestinian people and their posterity.

Israel's refusal to release Palestinian tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Government has increased the budget deficit and thus worsened the economic situation. The Palestinian Government's financial commitments have accumulated, including its commitment to pay salaries and to provide basic services to the people. All of this is being witnessed by the international community, yet no one has lifted a finger. These actions, which run counter to international law and legitimacy, have worsened the Palestinian people's suffering and have directly caused an escalation of violence, all as a result of continued occupation.

Given this obviously deteriorating situation, the international community continues to bear its historic responsibility. My delegation is waiting for the international community to shoulder its responsibility, as it did when it uprooted the apartheid regime in South Africa. We call on the international community to force Israel to respect international legitimacy and all decisions and resolutions related to the Palestinian cause, in keeping with the relevant resolutions adopted by the League of Arab States — the most recent of which related to the Arab Peace Initiative — as well as the principle of land for peace and the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Any current initiatives that do not take those requirements into account will not succeed. Moreover, any initiative that does not put an end to Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights and Lebanese territories will not be sustainable and thus will not succeed.

My delegation reaffirms its support for all efforts by members of the international community that will lead to a just solution aimed at the establishment of a Palestinian State and a life of freedom, rights and dignity for the Palestinian people.

Mr. Alateef (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to express my delegation's thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its efforts in fulfilling its responsibility to help the Palestinian people regain their usurped rights.

The fact that the question of Palestine has remained on the agenda of the General Assembly for more than 50 years clearly indicates the international community's failure to shoulder its responsibility towards the Palestinian people, to bring about peace and security in the Middle East, or to ensure the implementation of the provisions of international law.

For many decades the Palestinian people have been undergoing a genuine tragedy: their land has been usurped and half of them have been dispersed in a worldwide diaspora. Those left in Palestine have been subjected to brutal and bloody Israeli aggression that methodically violates international humanitarian law. Homes have been confiscated and demolished, people have been displaced, besieged and prevented access to food and medicine, innocent civilians have been killed, an apartheid wall has been constructed, agricultural lands have been burnt, and international laws, instruments, resolutions and decisions have been ignored.

Those actions clearly reflect the true — and evil — intention to establish a racist Jewish state on the land of Palestine. The injustice faced by the Palestinian people and the inability of the United Nations to protect them and to help them regain their rights, including the right to return, the right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent State on all their territory, prevent the achievement of peace and security in the region.

It is high time that the question of Palestine was addressed seriously, averting any attempt to impose fait accompli policies on the Palestinian people and deprive them of their legitimate rights. Libya has declared, and reaffirms again today, that the only solution leading to peace, security and stability in the region is one that safeguards the return of all Palestinian refugees to their land and the establishment of a democratic State on the historic land of Palestine, in which Arabs and Jews live with equal rights and duties — similar to the situation in South Africa where blacks and whites now coexist after decades of conflict, hatred and bloodletting.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East conflict. One consequence undoubtedly is the occupation of the Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanon and the aggression against it. It is high time that Member States concentrated their efforts on implementing United Nations resolutions on the Golan and unconditionally restored it to Syria. The Israeli occupying forces must be made to withdraw from the Sheba'a farmlands and to restore that area to Lebanon, and must be made to compensate both Syria and Lebanon for damage caused by the occupation.

The tragedy of the brotherly Iraqi people living under occupation has resulted in hundreds of thousands of people killed, hundreds of thousands injured and millions displaced or forced to become refugees. An urgent United Nations initiative is needed to solve the crisis. This would require the withdrawal of the occupying force, an end to the bloodletting, the restoration of Iraq's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity, and action enabling Iraqis to control their resources and capacities and to freely determine their own fate. Such a solution would also require the participation of all citizens in administering the country — without marginalizing any sector or faction — in order to bring peace, security and prosperity to Iraq.

Mr. Sow (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): A detailed consideration of agenda item 18 could not be held under more meaningful auspices than during this week, which is particularly symbolic since it coincides with the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People as well as the fortieth anniversary of the adoption, on 22 November 1967, of Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which laid the legal and political basis for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict and bringing about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In that context, the convening of the Annapolis Peace Conference on the laudable initiative of His

Excellency Mr. George Bush, President of the United States of America, is for my country, the Republic of Guinea, both a source of encouragement and a reason to hope for a revival of the negotiation process, which should promote the establishment of a sovereign, independent and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel.

My delegation welcomes the courageous efforts towards peace made by the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Ehud Olmert, and we call upon both parties to do everything possible to achieve a comprehensive agreement to establish the conditions for a lasting peace in accordance with the Annapolis road map.

We are convinced that the Palestinian and Israeli leaders can achieve that if they act in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular its resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and the Quartet road map of 2003. As Mr. Ban Ki-moon, our Secretary-General clearly emphasized,

> "The basis for a solution is clear: an end to the occupation that began in 1967, the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State, alongside a secure and fully recognized State of Israel, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, as called for in the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council" (*Press release SG/SM/10926*).

In the light of these guidelines for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, my delegation believes that the international community should renew and consolidate its efforts in order, first, to put an end once and for all to Israeli occupation by ensuring the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from the territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem; secondly, to put a stop to the colonization campaign waged by Israel, including the building of a separation wall in violation of international law and the provisions of the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice; thirdly, to define the status of and preserve the sacred nature of the Islamic and Christian holy places in Al-Quds Al-Sharif; fourthly, to encourage the resumption of an inter-Palestinian dialogue to facilitate the restoration of Palestinian national unity and the reconstruction, restructuring and reform of Palestinian institutions; and fifthly, to deal fairly with the problem of Palestinian refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

In other words, everything possible should be done to end the deterioration of the situation and to revive the peace process on a dynamic and credible basis.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its excellent report and, particularly, for the profound commitment evinced by its Chairman, our brother, Ambassador Paul Badji, the Permanent Representative of Senegal.

We appeal to the international community to provide the necessary assistance and support to the Committee and to the Division for Palestinian Rights so that they can effectively implement the mandate given them by the General Assembly and to mobilize international support in order to promote the effective exercise of inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Ms. Rodríguez de Ortiz (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Our delegation aligns itself with what was said by the representative of the Republic of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

On the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to reiterate its support for the Palestinian cause and its desire to contribute to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. We also support the noble task of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and we commend it on the activities it completed under its work programme during the year 2007.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is fully convinced that strict adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, in particular, respect for the sovereignty of States, the self-determination of peoples, non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of States, and the prohibition of the use of force against the territorial integrity or the political independence of any State, are fundamental to the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as peaceful coexistence among States.

Sovereignty resides exclusively in peoples and the fate of the great Palestinian people can only be determined by the Palestinians themselves. It is indispensable that the Palestinians be given full control of their territory. There can be no peace, security and stability while a foreign occupation is under way. Quite on the contrary, that will always provoke rejection by the people. This year, there have been four decades of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, and we reiterate the urgent appeal to Israel for it to withdraw from occupied Palestinian territory.

Venezuela supports the formula of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within internationally recognized secure borders, and we support all international initiatives designed to bring about an agreement that will achieve a peaceful, just and genuine solution to the Palestinian question, which is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Venezuela is concerned that the Government of the State of Israel continues to build the separation wall in the face of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. We reject the constant lockdown in the Gaza Strip, Israeli incursions into Palestinian centres of population and the system of checkpoints that control the entire West Bank and that have produced such extremely deplorable effects in the lives of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela considers that only a negotiated solution can achieve the objective of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. Such a solution must be based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and it must guarantee, in particular, the effective self-determination of the Palestinian people and the right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and retrieve the property from which they were displaced and uprooted.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): Viewed in the context of far too many years — almost a decade — without any process but with mounting bloodshed, destruction and misery, the talks that have just concluded in Annapolis assume enormous proportions. Sixty years have elapsed since the formation of the State of Israel and 40 years have elapsed since its occupation of the Palestinian territories and other Arab lands. More to the point, however, is that it has been over 15 years since the last international conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict, that of Madrid in 1991, and seven since the last face-to-face meeting between Israel and the Palestinians. During the intervening periods, the tension, suffering, dislocation, death and destruction have continued, borne almost entirely by civilians. In the absence, therefore, of any credible face-to-face negotiations, tensions and confusion have only escalated further and further, the logic of force taking precedence over the power of reason.

For this reason, we applaud President George Bush and Secretary Rice for using their considerable weight with the two parties to bring them together to launch serious discussions at Annapolis. The result has been an agreement to begin negotiations forthwith on 12 December of this year, with a commitment to reaching a two-State solution to the problem in 2008. As has been eloquently expressed by many speakers in this forum, such a solution means Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders. Praise must also be extended to President Abbas of Palestine and Prime Minister Olmert of Israel for their mettle and fortitude in undertaking the discussions at Annapolis, which have led to the Joint Understanding on the way forward. We see no reason, after 60 years of hostilities compounded by the harsh occupation of the last 40 years, why this high level of commitment should not, this time, result in a settlement in 2008, particularly with the stated firm involvement of the President of the United States and his commitment to peace in Palestine and throughout the whole Middle East.

This development could hardly have come at a better time. The living conditions of the Palestinian people have become intolerably miserable. Most importantly, poverty rates remain unacceptably high. Seventy per cent of households in Gaza, 56 per cent in the West Bank and 19 per cent in East Jerusalem live below the poverty line. The educational sector has been under increasing pressure, since Israel halted aid to the Palestinian Authority. In addition, Israel's infamous wall and other restrictions have severely impaired teacher and student access to schools and universities. The total available water supply has decreased over 10 per cent this year compared to last year in the West Bank, and decreases of over 40 per cent have occurred in Gaza. Less than half the households are connected to wastewater networks, while only 4.5 per cent of Gaza households consider their water of good quality.

We must look also at the fact that there are some 10,400 Palestinians held in some 30 Israeli jails, detention facilities and camps. Of those, 118 are women, 376 are children under 18, 183 have died and 1,000 have suffered serious illnesses. Almost two thirds of Gaza's population were refugees last year, and were desperately dependent on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). One million depended on it for health care, and a further 195,000 are enrolled in its schools.

Much of this picture of desperation in Palestine is due, of course, to Israel's decision to have no contact with a major segment of the Palestinian people and to withhold taxes and tariffs owed to the Palestinian Authority and used to finance its obligations. Direct international financial aid was also halted. Finally, there is the infamous wall, only 20 per cent of which corresponds to the Green Line, while some 154,320 acres of the West Bank, or 10.7 per cent of its land area, are trapped between the wall and the Green Line — 141,974 acres of that, or almost 92 per cent, in the Jerusalem area.

Most of these facts and statistics, it should be noted, come from the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of Palestinian People (A/62/35). This insightful report goes on to highlight the Committee's extreme concern with regard to Israel's military excursions into Gaza; its military operations in the West Bank; its extrajudicial killings; the destruction of Palestinian homes, civilian infrastructure and agricultural land; the large number of deaths and injuries; and the excessive and indiscriminate use of force. We remember all too well the attack and invasion of Lebanon with its objective of overkill and destruction, particularly the indiscriminate dropping of huge numbers of cluster bombs on civilian areas.

The report also makes note of the substantial illegal Israeli settlement activity and the construction of the wall, separating Palestinians from Jews while confiscating Arab farm and residential land, or at least significantly reducing its practical value. The wall was and is being constructed in contravention of the three-year-old Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. We must also recognize the continual closure of Gaza borders, which Israel deems a hostile territory, while it applies additional sanctions. Finally, it must be noted that the report justifiably condemns all attacks against Israeli citizens by Palestinians.

Along these lines, it is critical to note that just months after the Six-Day War the legal counsel of Israel's Foreign Ministry was asked whether international law permitted settlement in the newly conquered land. The Ministry's counsel replied in no uncertain terms that it was his conclusion that civilian settlement in the administered territories contravened the explicit provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel, by the way, is a signatory of the Convention, which forbids an occupying Power from moving part of its population into occupied territory. The counsel also rejected the Ministry's argument that the West Bank was not normal occupied territory because the land status was uncertain.

It is crucial to grasp, in this litany of condemnation of Israeli policy and actions against Palestinians and other Arab nations, the effect that this all has in the greater Muslim world. Unfortunately, this effect extends beyond Israel and encompasses portions of the West. For this reason we agree with the report's statement that there must be greater recognition that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the major underlying factors in the current rift between Western and Islamic societies.

Without a concerted effort to resolve the issue and eliminate this international flashpoint, the situation will only fester while continuing to involve other outside players. Virtually any tense spot or conflict in the Middle East can trace its roots back to Palestine and the actions of the Israelis. The situation has not been improving, which makes it imperative that no effort should be spared to bring the conflict to an end. That is why we take the Annapolis Conference very seriously for its commitment to negotiations leading to a 2008 settlement, promising independence and dignity for the Palestinians and recognition and durable security for Israel.

This settlement must be based upon recognized international standards, such as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2003) and 1515 (2003) in particular, as well as other related resolutions. Account should also be taken of the efforts and suggestions of other bodies, such as the Quartet and its road map, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States in Beirut in

March 2002 and the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings, which call for immediate implementation.

It should be borne in mind that Israel has technically withdrawn from Gaza and parts of the Northern West Bank and dismantled of some illegal Jewish settlements there. These steps are in line with measures called for in the implementation of the Quartet's road map, but obviously much more must be done. For example, the return of the Golan Heights, which Jewish farmers pressured Israeli forces to take by their provocations during the Six-Day War, must be undertaken as part of the settlement process.

The usefulness of the Conference at Annapolis relative to the peace process will be judged by what happens in 2008. How much political capital will be expended when the core impasse issues are confronted again, the so-called final status issues: the recognized and accepted borders, the Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and the return of the Palestinian refugees to their rightful places. Annapolis therefore demonstrates that Israel is prepared to negotiate in good faith with the Palestinians. If so, 2008 will be a pivotal year, one in which prospects for a peaceful future for mankind would improve significantly. Let us hope that will be the case!

Mr. McNee (Canada): Canada is strongly committed to a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. Canada maintains its longstanding support for a two-State solution; one that recognizes Israel's right to live within secure borders and which also includes the establishment of a democratic, independent and viable Palestinian State.

This week in Annapolis, the Israelis and Palestinians agreed in a Joint Understanding to work towards a peace agreement by the end of 2008. This historic development came about through the determination, vision and efforts of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, under the leadership of the United States.

The progress achieved during that Conference brings renewed hope. Canada is especially encouraged by the robust presence and support of the international community at Annapolis, notably from the Arab world, whose renewed commitment is vital for a comprehensive peace agreement. We urge Arab States to continue to support these efforts, including through the Arab Peace Initiative and by constructively engaging in the peace process.

Canada fully supports the process launched at Annapolis; we are prepared to do all we can to help the parties. We also welcome the international community's commitment to helping the Palestinians. For our part, Canada will be working with the Palestinians on a programme of assistance to address areas of governance, security and prosperity.

Canada also supports initiatives towards creating the necessary conditions for peace. In this regard, Canada believes that the Israeli decision to freeze the expansion of settlements is vital.

(*spoke in French*)

The cessation of all forms of violence is a primary precursor to any form of lasting peace. That means ending the campaign of rocket attacks and the return of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit to his family in Israel. Similarly, while we recognize Israel's security concerns and its right to defend itself, its actions must be measured. Israel must exercise the utmost restraint and meet its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law.

All parties have a responsibility to avoid civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. Canada urges the United Nations and its Member States to play a more constructive role in supporting peace. While Canada recognizes the indispensable role of United Nations agencies in delivering humanitarian and development assistance to the region, Canada strongly believes that resolutions adopted by the General Assembly should complement these efforts. Canada remains concerned by the disproportionate focus placed by this Assembly on the situation in the Middle East, in particular by the number of resolutions that single out Israel. Rather, these resolutions should contribute to setting the parties on a path towards a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

In conclusion, because of renewed optimism in the region and the decisive step that has been taken, Canada believes that the international community, including all United Nations bodies, must focus the efforts to help the parties achieve sustainable peace.

Mr. Sangqu (South Africa): On a daily basis, Palestinians in the occupied territories continue to face an Israeli policy that violates the basic principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The reality is that Palestinians continue to live under an occupation that they have endured for decades. They face daily hardships compounded by hundreds of checkpoints that restrict their movement and access. Violent incursions by the Israeli army into Palestinian areas continue unabated, while Israeli settlements and the separation wall expand in spite of international condemnation. These actions undermine positive movements towards peace.

We believe that the only way to bring about peace in the Middle East is to have a comprehensive and unconditional negotiated settlement to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan Heights. This will contribute towards peace and security throughout the Middle East region and will have a positive effect on global peace and security.

South Africa welcomes the holding of the Annapolis Conference, which for the first time brought together many countries keen on supporting the peace process in the Middle East. We also welcome the Joint Understanding reached by the parties. We commend the efforts undertaken by the parties, Palestine and Israel, which bear the primary responsibility for achieving peace. The international community has the duty to assist and support the parties as they work to reach a settlement, and also to ensure that political progress is coupled with a change for the better in the lives of Palestinians and Israelis. In that regard, we commend previous regional and international efforts to move the peace process forward, including the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

Experience has shown that successful conflict resolution has as its basis the willingness of the parties to negotiate without preconditions. To encourage the parties, we can refer to South Africa's own historical experience of negotiating an end to the conflict in our country that, at times, seemed unsolvable. This encourages us to believe that such a settlement is possible in the Middle East. Despite the violence and despair that threatens peaceful change in conflict situations, our belief is that the only alternative is an inclusive negotiated solution.

It is for this reason that we support the launch by the Annapolis Conference of a process of negotiation to solve all issues, including final status issues, leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State. We wish to reiterate our view that the way forward must include the establishment of an independent, economically viable State of Palestine existing side by side, in peace, with Israel, with both States enjoying secure and internationally recognized borders. This vision of a two-State solution has already been enshrined in various United Nations resolutions.

We also realize the need to underpin the political undertakings of Annapolis by ensuring capacity-building and financial support for Palestine by the international community. We therefore commend the Republic of France for its willingness to host a donors conference later this year. We also reiterate the position of the South African Minister for Foreign Affairs that South Africa intends to work with our partners within the India, Brazil and South Africa framework to assist with sustainable economic development and capacity-building in Palestine.

These efforts must, however, be undertaken in a serious and genuine manner in order to result in concrete and meaningful steps forward. Otherwise, we are afraid we will see a repetition of a failed process and Palestinian suffering will grow worse. We also take note of the words of Prime Minister Olmert during the Annapolis Conference when he said that "I am convinced that the reality that emerged in our region in 1967 will change significantly". South Africa trusts that this changing reality that the Prime Minister is referring to will reflect the wishes of the international community as expressed by United Nations resolutions.

In the end, there must be and will be peace between Israel and Palestine. There must be and will be peace between Israel and the Arab world. The violent days that have seen the deaths of so many Palestinians and Israelis must end and end soon.

Mr. Maema (Lesotho): My delegation wishes to congratulate the President for the able leadership and skill he has shown in presiding over the Assembly at its sixty-second session.

The delegation of Lesotho wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report entitled, "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", contained in document A/62/344. Our congratulations also go to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its report (A/62/35), which contains valuable recommendations regarding the solution of the question of Palestine. In particular, my delegation wishes to thank the Committee's Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji of Senegal, and its

Rapporteur, His Excellency Mr. Victor Camilleri of Malta, for their enlightening remarks.

Lesotho aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. The year 2007 marks 40 years of occupation of the Palestinian territory. It marks four decades of repression of the Palestinian people, as well as the suppression of their rights, including their right to self-determination. Moreover, it marks an unacceptably long period in which the international community has failed to bring an end to the plight of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory.

My delegation is indeed disheartened that, once again, reports have been presented to this Assembly of the escalating Israeli violence and disproportionate use of force against the Palestinian people, which has often resulted in the loss of life and extensive destruction of property. We wish to reiterate our deep concern that the struggle by the Palestinian people for self-determination, national independence and sovereignty is ongoing and the cost in terms of human lives continues to escalate. In our view, the time has come for members of the international community to unequivocally denounce the atrocities and violations of human rights that the Palestinian people, particularly the civilian population, have had to endure for decades.

Lesotho firmly believes that all parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must adhere to the principles of international law. In this regard, we wish to reiterate a view already expressed by several previous speakers that a just, comprehensive and long-lasting settlement to the conflict can only be achieved through the observance of international law and by implementing, among others, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and other relevant United Nations resolutions. At this juncture, I would like to underline that it is the view of my delegation that the lack of respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as the failure to implement the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, are driving forces behind the continuing high levels of violence that severely affects unarmed civilians, particularly women and children, in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In recent years, the humanitarian, economic, social, political and security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has deteriorated even further. My delegation wishes to reiterate its appeal to the international donors that suspended assistance programmes to the Palestinian people to consider adopting measures that would not further increase the tension and/or have a punitive effect on the entire Palestinian population. The grave humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory should not be allowed to deteriorate any further.

Lesotho is hopeful that the recently concluded Annapolis Conference will achieve its desired results. We are convinced that it is only through a negotiated solution that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine can be attained. Lesotho views the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as the cornerstone for bringing the question of Palestine to a final, true and sustainable peaceful settlement.

May the vision of a Palestinian State based on the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in secure borders, be realized, at last.

Mr. Maksom (Malaysia): First of all, Sir, let me associate myself with the statements made by Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

We continue to discuss the question of Palestine again and again for the simple reason that we have not arrived at a just solution to the problem. Throughout the time we continue to discuss this issue, the plight of the Palestinian people shows no hope of improving. In fact, for the last 40 years since the occupation, the Palestinian people continue to live under constant harassment and in dire hardship, fearful for their lives, their property, livelihood and more so, their future. They have suffered countless human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, excessive and indiscriminate use of force, incarceration and the destruction of homes, infrastructure and agricultural lands. The actions of impunity by the occupying Power continue unabated, in disregard of their obligations under international law, conventions and human rights norms, and in spite of condemnation by the international community, including this body.

The opportunities for peace and a just solution to this question have been there, but the hopes to achieve it have been dashed every time. On many occasions, the blame and the burden was laid on the Palestinians to make more concessions towards the achievement of peace. Surely the international community cannot expect this people, who has suffered 40 years of subjugation and occupation, to offer concessions, when to begin with there are almost none to give.

The failure to arrive at a just solution to this problem has directly and indirectly affected regional, as well as global, peace and has left adverse, far-reaching consequences. It has thwarted the prospect of achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It has hardened feelings and fired up the passions of large groups of people around the globe, particularly in the Muslim world, against the West, which comes in response to the seemingly blind eye turned by certain Western countries to the excesses of the Israeli occupation regime.

It is imperative that a lasting and durable solution to this problem be found on the basis of justice and humanity. We already have with us the necessary tools to achieve this objective, including various General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, in particular 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

But these tools will remain nothing more than tools if we lack the most important component required to reach an effective, permanent solution to the conflict. What is required is the sincere, strong and committed political will by all parties concerned. Without a political solution, nothing can be achieved. A just and comprehensive solution, including the two-State solution, is feasible and achievable, provided the two parties concerned continue to be focused, committed and determined to resolve all the core and fundamental issues.

While efforts are under way to find a just solution to this conflict, we urge all concerned parties to cease any actions that could jeopardize this effort, including attacks on the civilian population, either military or economic. The Israeli occupying Power must comply with its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and international law and must immediately cease any actions that violate the human dignity and economic livelihood of the Palestinian people, as well as any that alter the demography of the land through the establishment of settlements and the construction of the illegal separation wall. The Assembly's session today must send a clear message that we condemn these actions, since they are immoral, inhuman, intolerable and illegal; they constitute unambiguous and serious violations of international law and United Nations resolutions, including those adopted by the Security Council. As the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations, the Assembly must see to it that it takes up a stronger role in efforts to stop the occupation.

Yesterday we observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This year marks 40 years of Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, the longest in history. These events only serve to remind us of our collective failure with respect to the Palestinian people. We owe it to them to see to it that this year is the last time we observe such events. We welcome the convening of the recent Annapolis Conference; we view it as paving the way for the attainment of a just and lasting solution to the conflict. Following the Annapolis Conference, we look forward with high hopes to an eventual just and comprehensive solution to the Palestine question, including the realization of a two-State solution, of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Sir, allow me first of all to associate myself with the statement made by the Ambassador of Cuba, His Excellency Mr. Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

At the same time, I want to express my delegation's support for the work carried out during this session by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I thank the Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Paul Badji of Senegal, for the report he introduced yesterday on the sensitive situation in Palestine and on the work of the Committee (A/62/35).

Nicaragua considers that the continuation of the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory is the root cause of the Palestinian and Middle East conflicts. That is why my Government and my people support international efforts towards a settlement of this situation and a solid, lasting peace in the region, with the creation of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State.

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was marked yesterday, 29 November 2007, the President of the Republic of Nicaragua, Commander Daniel Ortega Saavedra, sent a message of solidarity to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People stating clearly the position of Nicaragua as regards the question of Palestine. The message reads as follows:

> "The Government of National Reconciliation and Unity of Nicaragua reaffirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its authorities in their just struggle to establish a sovereign and independent Palestinian State. The Palestinian people has for decades endured the Israeli occupation of its territories, and its greatest aspiration is to redeem its legitimate ancestral rights to retrieve its occupied lands and establish a free, independent and viable State.
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> "The situation in Palestine has been deteriorating year after year as a result of the continuation of Israel's illegal practices, including continued violations of the right to life and personal security of Palestinians through the indiscriminate use of force, in violation of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights standards, which have, in turn, led to an extremely difficult economic, social and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.
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> "The situation worsened further once the illegal construction of the wall to separate and dismember the Palestinian territory began. It isolates municipalities and separates them from East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, which has a devastating impact, materially, economically and socially. It is worrying that Israel is announcing further restrictions, such as cutting back the essential provision of energy and fuel, which is a collective violation of the rights of the civilian population and violates of the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
>
> "It is important to take measures to build the confidence necessary to drive negotiations between the parties that will make it possible to move towards the irreversible achievement of a just peace, based on the existence of two States.
>
> "We believe that the problem of Palestine is at the core of the problems in the Middle East. My Government advocates a politically just solution to the problem of Palestine, in the light of the various resolutions adopted by the United Nations and consistent with the principle of land for peace, established at the Madrid Conference and in the Arab Peace Initiative.
>
> "The Government and the people of Nicaragua support the just cause of the Palestinian people as a matter of principle. Along with the rest of the international community, we consider it necessary to intensify international efforts to find a peaceful solution that will lead to the creation of the Palestinian State, which is the only way to bring about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East."

Mr. Khammanichanh (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Let me begin by thanking the President for convening these important meetings on agenda item 18, "Question of Palestine". I am sure that under his able leadership the meetings will be crowned with success. We also thank the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their comprehensive reports presented under this agenda item (A/62/344 and A/62/35). My delegation also associates itself with the statement made on this question by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This year's celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It also marked six decades of the arduous and unyielding struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, namely the right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, and the right of return for Palestine refugees. The occasion reminds us that the road to peace in this region is anything but easy and that peace cannot be achieved by force. Lasting peace will not exist unless statehood for the Palestinians is realized and security for the Israelis is guaranteed. Therefore, all efforts aimed at putting an end to the occupation and bringing about a comprehensive, just and permanent solution to the question of Palestine should be encouraged and supported by the international community.

The lingering violence in the region and the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people remain a source of grave concern to the international community. As reflected in the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/62/35), the critical situation on the ground is beyond an economic and political siege. The Palestinian people have endured constant misery and oppression. The de facto sanctions imposed for the past nearly two years have affected every aspect of Palestinian life, entailing an ever-increasing pervasive malnutrition. The restrictions on Gaza have had a particularly severe socio-economic and humanitarian impact, having inflicted further suffering on the local population. All of this makes these people heavily dependent on aid. The extension of Israeli settlements, the construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory and the setting up of checkpoints throughout the West Bank have not only denied the people free movement to attend to their basic needs, but have also triggered an upsurge in violence in the area. This situation requires an immediate remedy.

The occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sustainable peace and stability in the region will remain elusive as long as the national rights of the Palestinian people are not ensured. In this context, the Lao People's Democratic Republic reiterates its firm support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in the pursuit of their legitimate cause in the struggle for their inalienable rights. We stress the necessity of achieving a just solution to their cause, based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Not only has the six-decade-long conflict prevented the Palestinian people from enjoying their inalienable rights, but it also continues to threaten regional and international peace and security. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community to redouble its efforts to ensure the expeditious and full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The President returned to the Chair.

It is only through such efforts that a negotiated two-State solution can be achieved, bringing about an end to the occupation and leading to the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its neighbours.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 18.

I would like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/62/L.18 to A/62/L.21 will be taken at a later date to be announced.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 18.

Organization of work

I should like to consult members regarding an extension of the work of the Second Committee. Members will recall that, at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 21 September 2007, the General Assembly approved the recommendation of the General Committee that the Second Committee complete its work by Friday, 30 November 2007. However, the President has just been informed by the Chairperson of the Second Committee that the Committee will not be able to complete its work today, 30 November, and will need to hold additional meetings until Friday, 7 December 2007.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to extend the work of the Second Committee until Friday, 7 December 2007? I see no objection.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.